Sunstone

Volume 2

Stjepan Sejic

image

TOP COW PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Top Cow Productions Presents...

Sunstone

Created by Stjepan Sejic

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Top Cow Productions Presents...

Sunstone™

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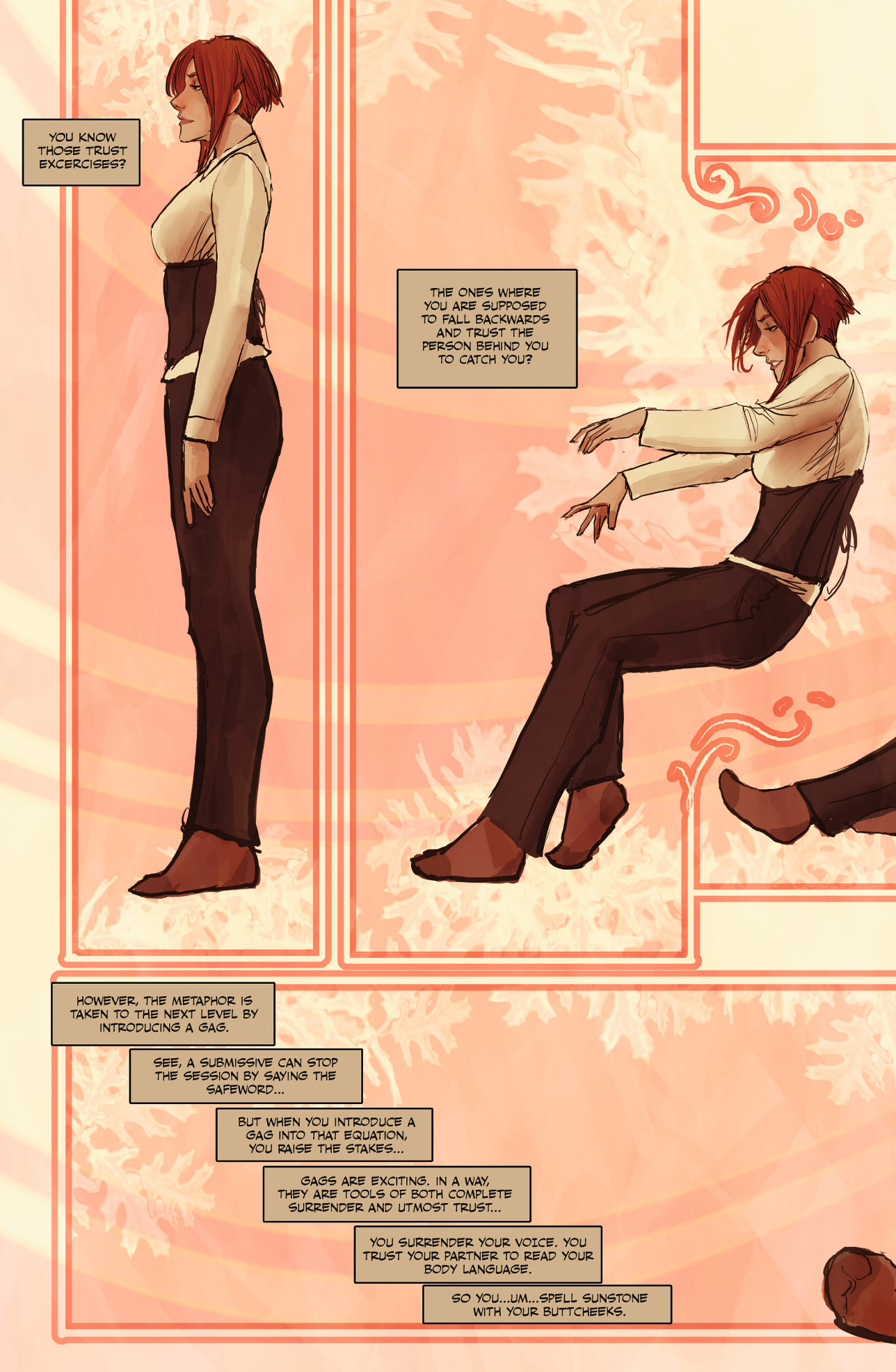
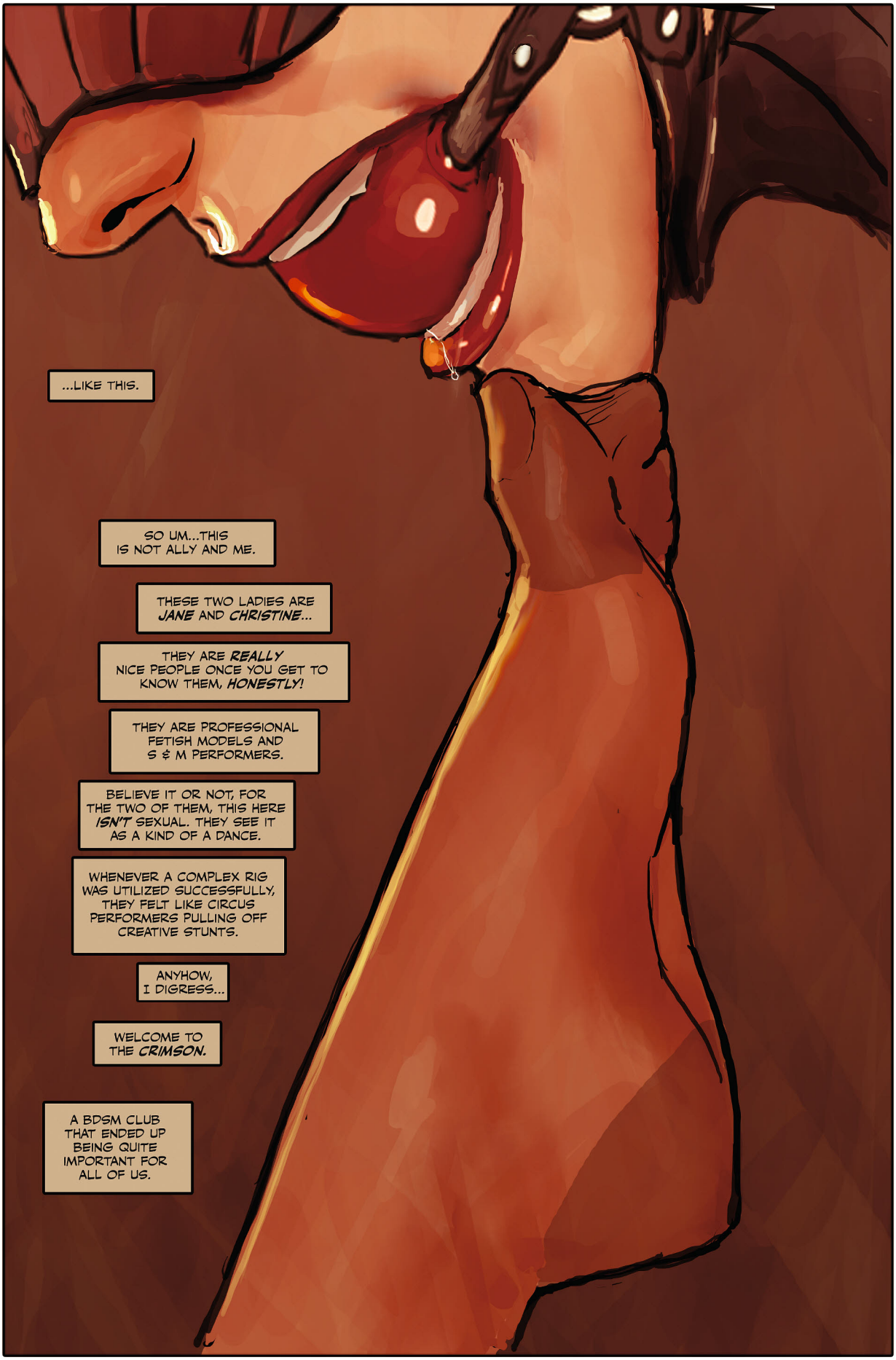
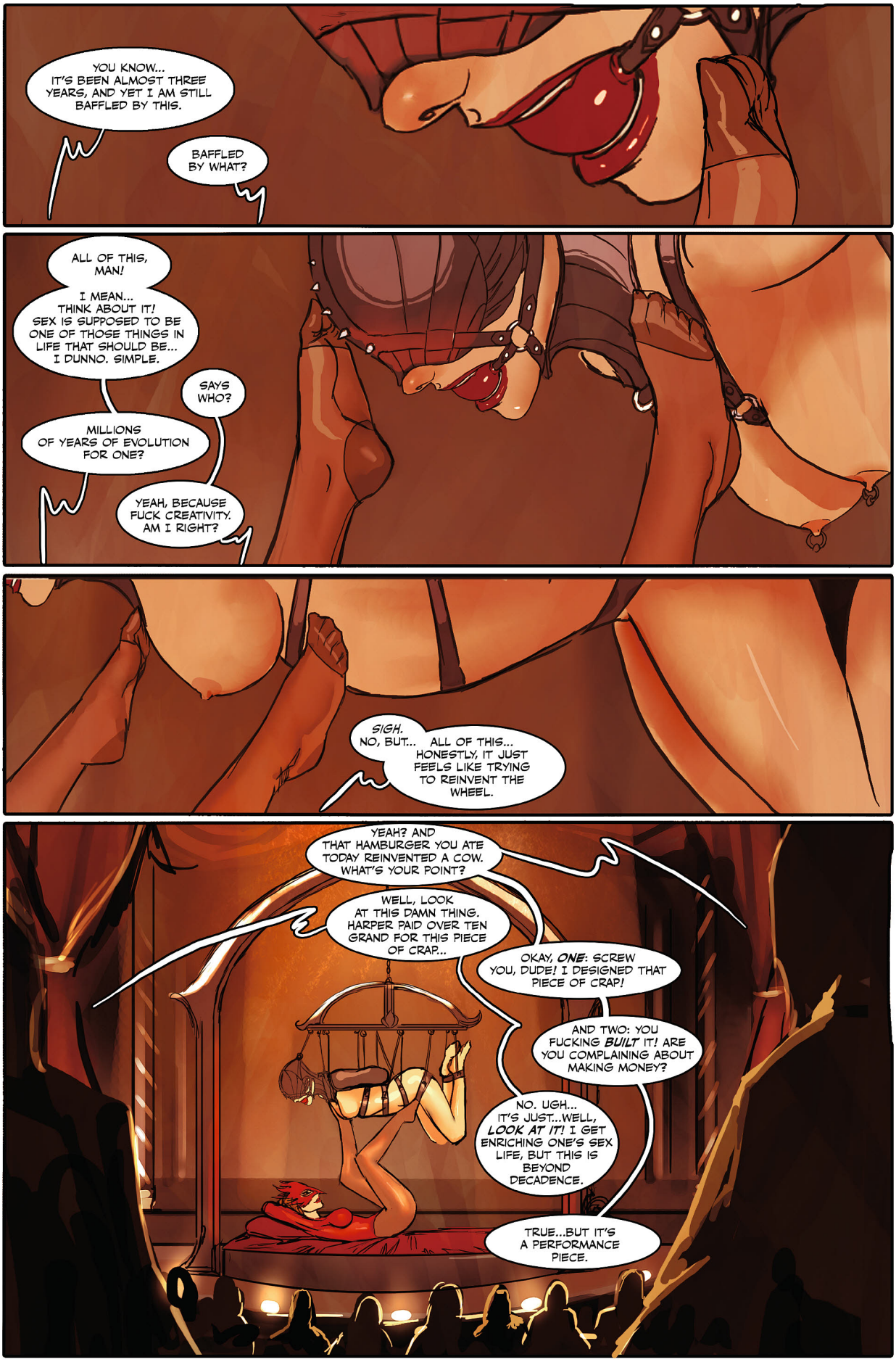
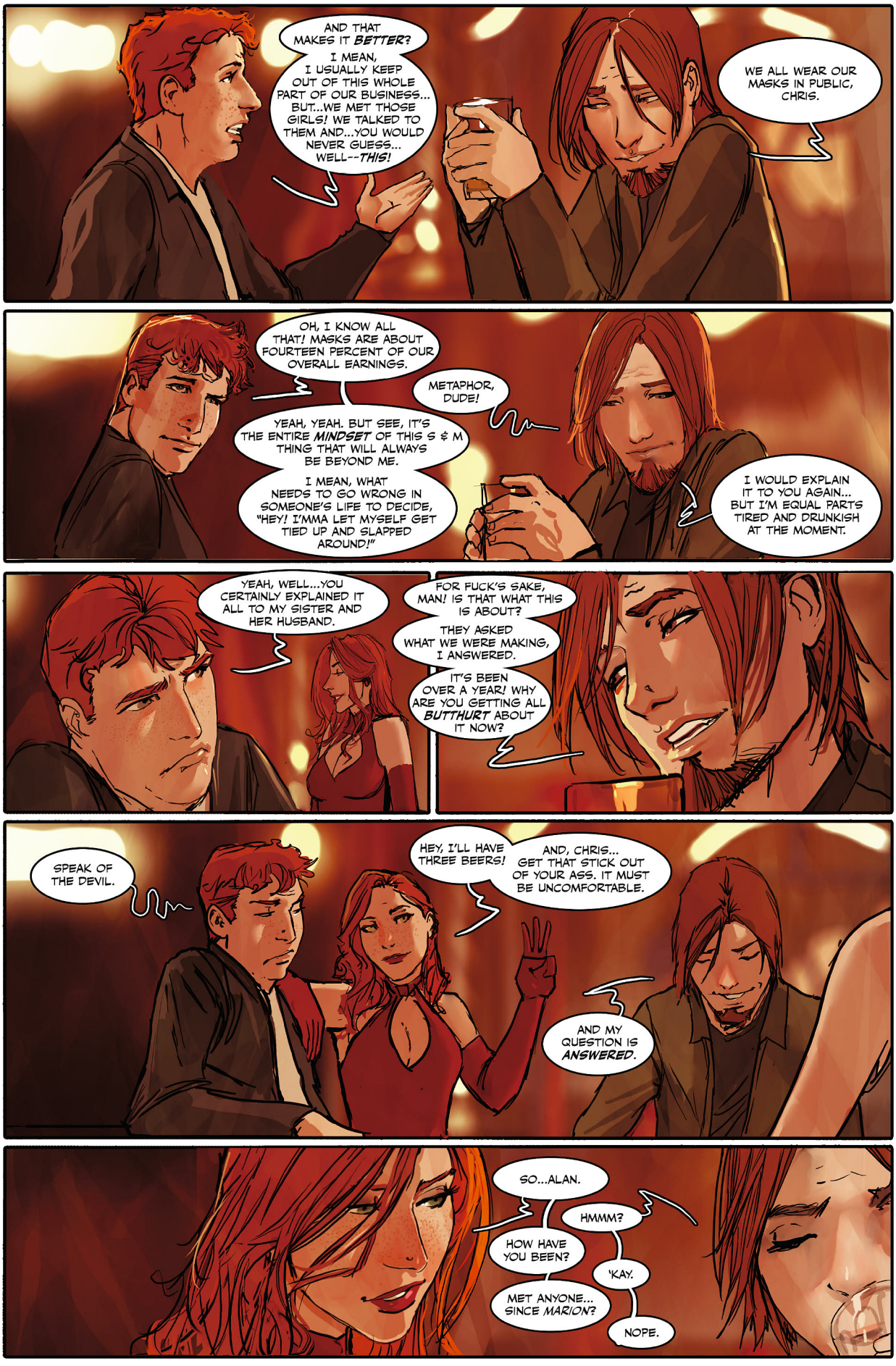

YOU KNOW THOSE TRUST EXCERCISES?
THE ONES WHERE YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO FALL BACKWARDS AND TRUST THE PERSON BEHIND YOU TO CATCH YOU?
HOWEVER, THE METAPHOR IS TAKEN TO THE NEXT LEVEL BY INTRODUCING A GAG.
SEE, A SUBMISSIVE CAN STOP THE SESSION BY SAYING THE SAFEWORD...
BUT WHEN YOU INTRODUCE A GAG INTO THAT EQUATION, YOU RAISE THE STAKES...
GAGS ARE EXCITING. IN A WAY, THEY ARE TOOLS OF BOTH COMPLETE SURRENDER AND UTMOST TRUST...
YOU SURRENDER YOUR VOICE. YOU TRUST YOUR PARTNER TO READ YOUR BODY LANGUAGE.
SO YOU...UM...SPELL SUNSTONE WITH YOUR BUTTCHEEKS.

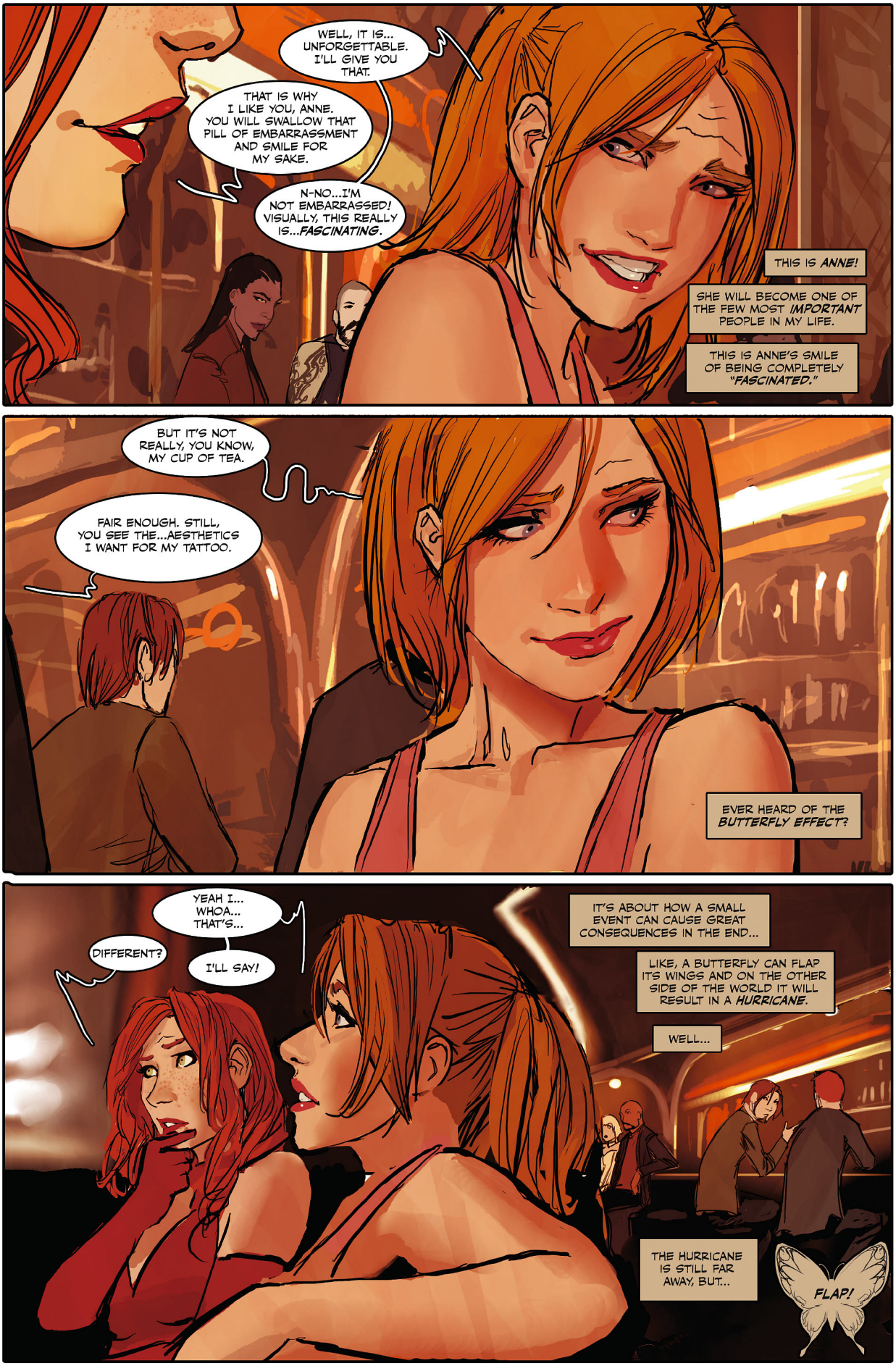
I ALWAYS FOUND THAT TO BE A NICE LITTLE METAPHOR FOR BDSM. YOU FALL, YOU RELINQUISH CONTROL, AND TRUST YOUR PARTNER TO CATCH YOU.
ANYHOO...BACK TO THE POINT! WHY AM I STARTING THE CHAPTER LIKE THIS?
TWO REASONS, REALLY!
ONE: I WANTED TO STATE MY OPINION THAT GAGS ARE FRIGGIN' *HOT!*
AND TWO: UM...WELL...IT'S CERTAINLY MORE SUBTLE THAN MY INITIAL PLAN OF STARTING US OFF...

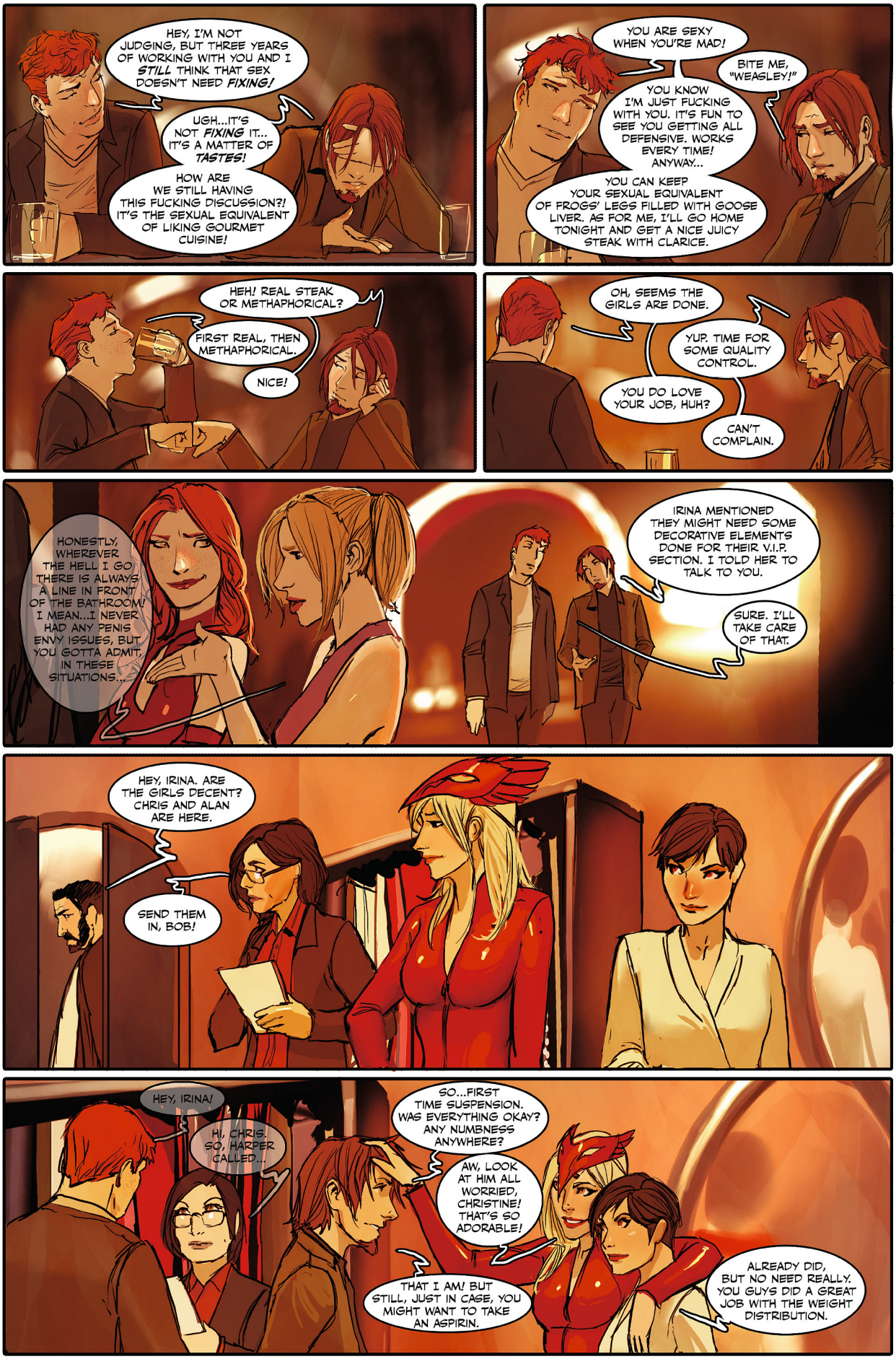

...LIKE THIS.
SO UM...THIS IS NOT ALLY AND ME.
THESE TWO LADIES ARE *JANE* AND *CHRISTINE*...
THEY ARE *REALLY* NICE PEOPLE ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW THEM, *HONESTLY*!
THEY ARE PROFESSIONAL FETISH MODELS AND S & M PERFORMERS.
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, FOR THE TWO OF THEM, THIS HERE *ISN'T* SEXUAL. THEY SEE IT AS A KIND OF A DANCE.
WHENEVER A COMPLEX RIG WAS UTILIZED SUCCESSFULLY, THEY FELT LIKE CIRCUS PERFORMERS PULLING OFF CREATIVE STUNTS.
ANYHOW, I DIGRESS...
WELCOME TO THE *CRIMSON.*
A BDSM CLUB THAT ENDED UP BEING QUITE IMPORTANT FOR ALL OF US.

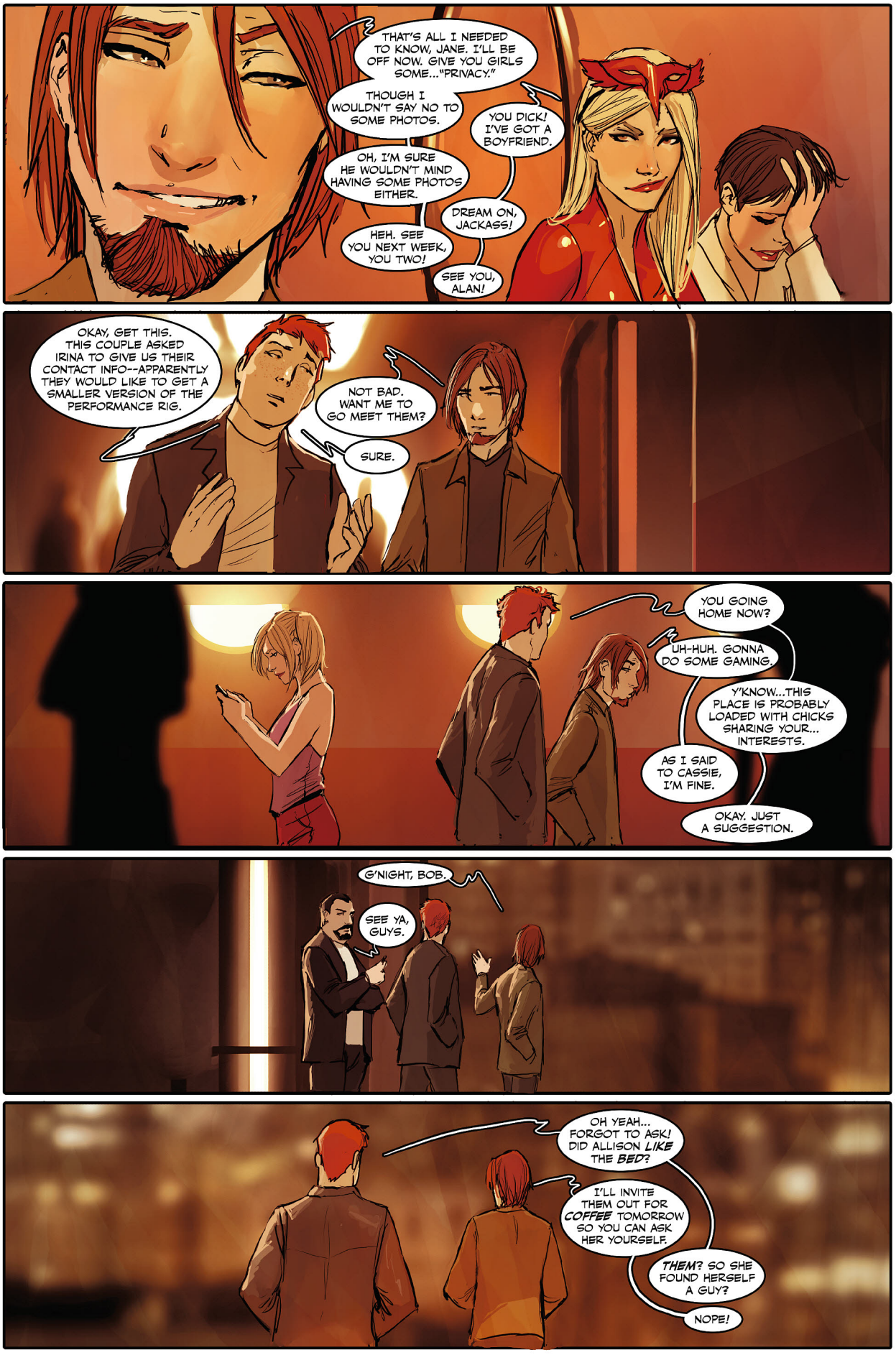

YOU KNOW... IT'S BEEN ALMOST THREE YEARS, AND YET I AM STILL BAFFLED BY THIS.
BAFFLED BY WHAT?
ALL OF THIS, MAN!
I MEAN... THINK ABOUT IT! SEX IS SUPPOSED TO BE ONE OF THOSE THINGS IN LIFE THAT SHOULD BE... I DUNNO. SIMPLE.
SAYS WHO?
MILLIONS OF YEARS OF EVOLUTION FOR ONE?
YEAH, BECAUSE FUCK CREATIVITY. AM I RIGHT?
SIGH. NO, BUT... ALL OF THIS... HONESTLY, IT JUST FEELS LIKE TRYING TO REINVENT THE WHEEL.
YEAH? AND THAT HAMBURGER YOU ATE TODAY REINVENTED A COW. WHAT'S YOUR POINT?
WELL, LOOK AT THIS DAMN THING. HARPER PAID OVER TEN GRAND FOR THIS PIECE OF CRAP...
OKAY, ONE: SCREW YOU, DUDE! I DESIGNED THAT PIECE OF CRAP!
AND TWO: YOU FUCKING BUILT IT! ARE YOU COMPLAINING ABOUT MAKING MONEY?
NO. UGH... IT'S JUST...WELL, LOOK AT IT! I GET ENRICHING ONE'S SEX LIFE, BUT THIS IS BEYOND DECADENCE.
TRUE...BUT IT'S A PERFORMANCE PIECE.

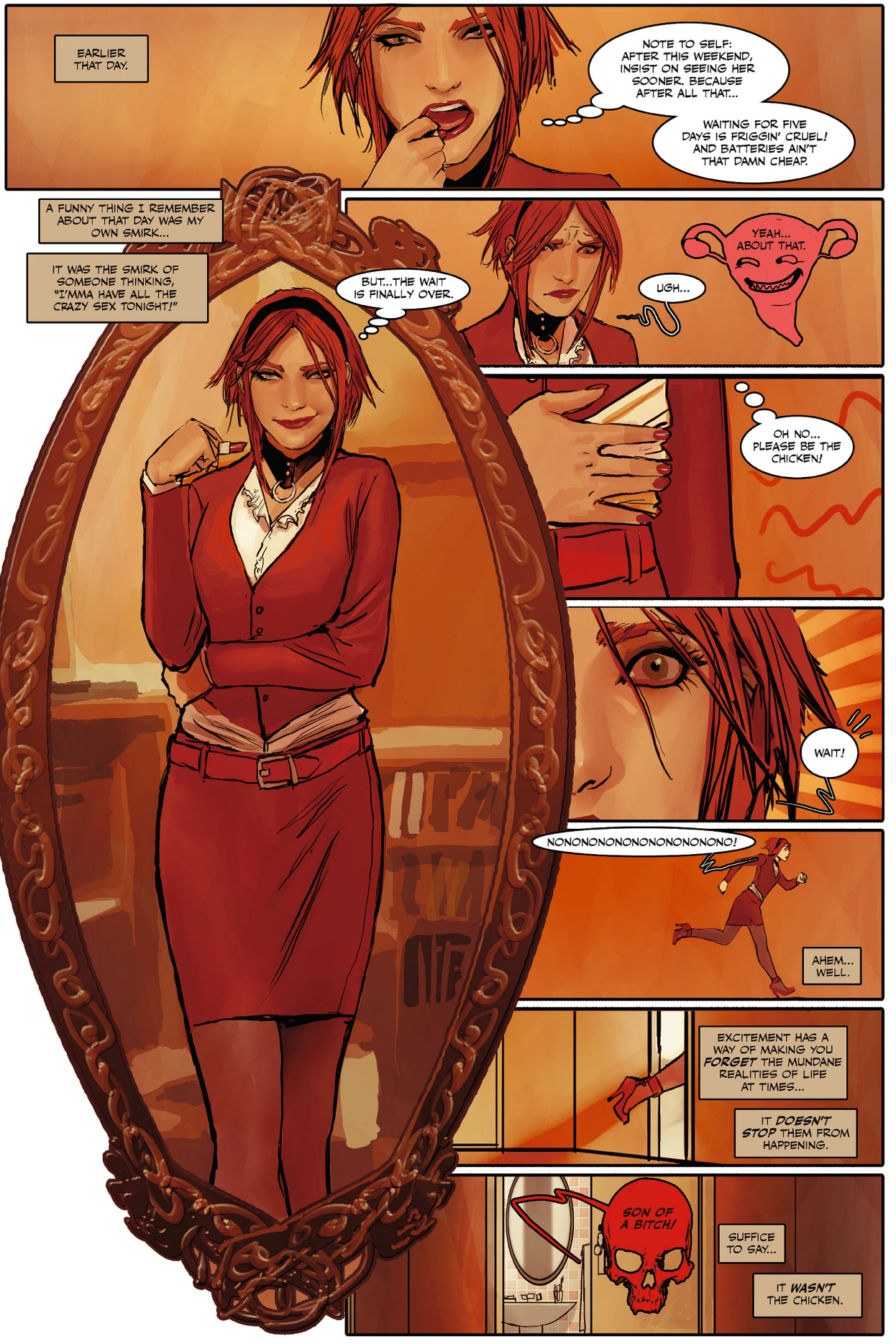

AND THAT MAKES IT BETTER?
I MEAN, I USUALLY KEEP OUT OF THIS WHOLE PART OF OUR BUSINESS... BUT...WE MET THOSE GIRLS! WE TALKED TO THEM AND...YOU WOULD NEVER GUESS... WELL--THIS!
WE ALL WEAR OUR MASKS IN PUBLIC, CHRIS.
OH, I KNOW ALL THAT! MASKS ARE ABOUT FOURTEEN PERCENT OF OUR OVERALL EARNINGS.
METAPHOR, DUDE!
YEAH, YEAH. BUT SEE, IT'S THE ENTIRE MINDSET OF THIS S & M THING THAT WILL ALWAYS BE BEYOND ME.
I MEAN, WHAT NEEDS TO GO WRONG IN SOMEONE'S LIFE TO DECIDE, "HEY! I'MMA LET MYSELF GET TIED UP AND SLAPPED AROUND!"
I WOULD EXPLAIN IT TO YOU AGAIN... BUT I'M EQUAL PARTS TIRED AND DRUNKISH AT THE MOMENT.
YEAH, WELL...YOU CERTAINLY EXPLAINED IT ALL TO MY SISTER AND HER HUSBAND.
FOR FUCK'S SAKE, MAN! IS THAT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT?
THEY ASKED WHAT WE WERE MAKING, I ANSWERED.
IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR! WHY ARE YOU GETTING ALL BUTTHURT ABOUT IT NOW?
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL.
HEY, I'LL HAVE THREE BEERS!
AND, CHRIS... GET THAT STICK OUT OF YOUR ASS. IT MUST BE UNCOMFORTABLE.
AND MY QUESTION IS ANSWERED.
SO...ALAN.
HMMM?
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?
'KAY.
MET ANYONE... SINCE MARION?
NOPE.

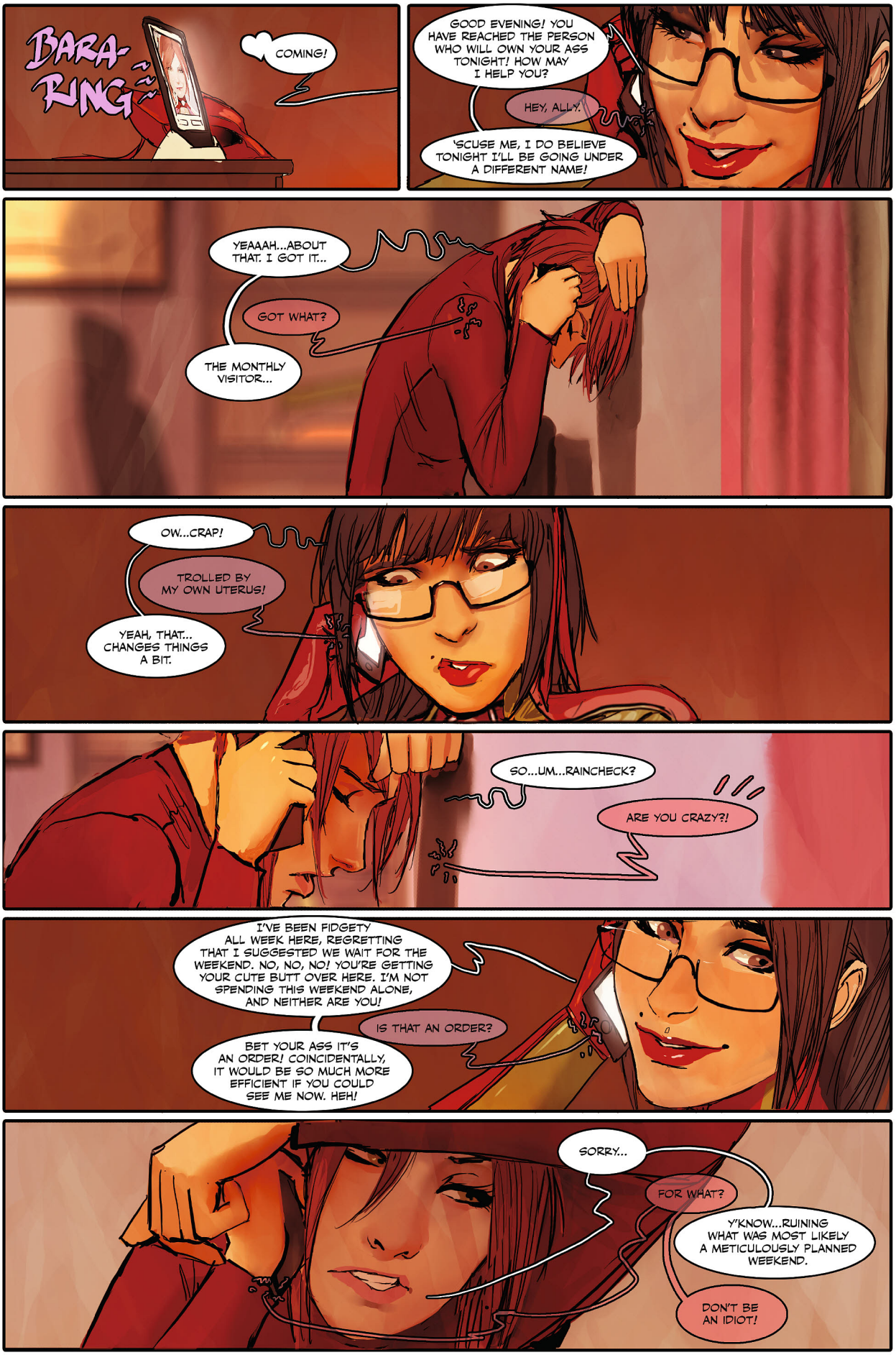
THING IS...I GOT A FRIEND HERE.
CASSIE, IT'S OKAY. I'M ACTUALLY ENJOYING THE SOLITUDE FOR NOW.
ARE YOU SURE?
POSITIVE!
OKAY THEN... JUST SAY THE WORD THOUGH!
THANKS, CASSIE. OH, AND SAY HI TO TOM FOR ME.
WILL DO!
HEY, HONEY. ALAN SAYS HI.
OH, HE'S HERE TOO? WHY DIDN'T YOU INVITE HIM OVER?
I DID, BUT YOU KNOW HIM.
HE'S "FINE?"
HE'S "FINE!"
SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE SHOW?
HAH! WHEN YOU SAID IT WAS UNLIKE ANYTHING I'VE EVER SEEN, YOU REALLY MEANT IT.
I USUALLY DO.


WELL, IT IS... UNFORGETTABLE. I'LL GIVE YOU THAT.
THAT IS WHY I LIKE YOU, ANNE. YOU WILL SWALLOW THAT PILL OF EMBARRASSMENT AND SMILE FOR MY SAKE.
N-NO...I'M NOT EMBARRASSED! VISUALLY, THIS REALLY IS...FASCINATING.
THIS IS ANNE!
SHE WILL BECOME ONE OF THE FEW MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN MY LIFE.
THIS IS ANNE'S SMILE OF BEING COMPLETELY "FASCINATED."
BUT IT'S NOT REALLY, YOU KNOW, MY CUP OF TEA.
FAIR ENOUGH. STILL, YOU SEE THE...AESTHETICS I WANT FOR MY TATTOO.
EVER HEARD OF THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT?
YEAH I... WHOA... THAT'S...
DIFFERENT?
I'LL SAY!
IT'S ABOUT HOW A SMALL EVENT CAN CAUSE GREAT CONSEQUENCES IN THE END...
LIKE, A BUTTERFLY CAN FLAP ITS WINGS AND ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD IT WILL RESULT IN A HURRICANE.
WELL...
THE HURRICANE IS STILL FAR AWAY, BUT...
FLAP!

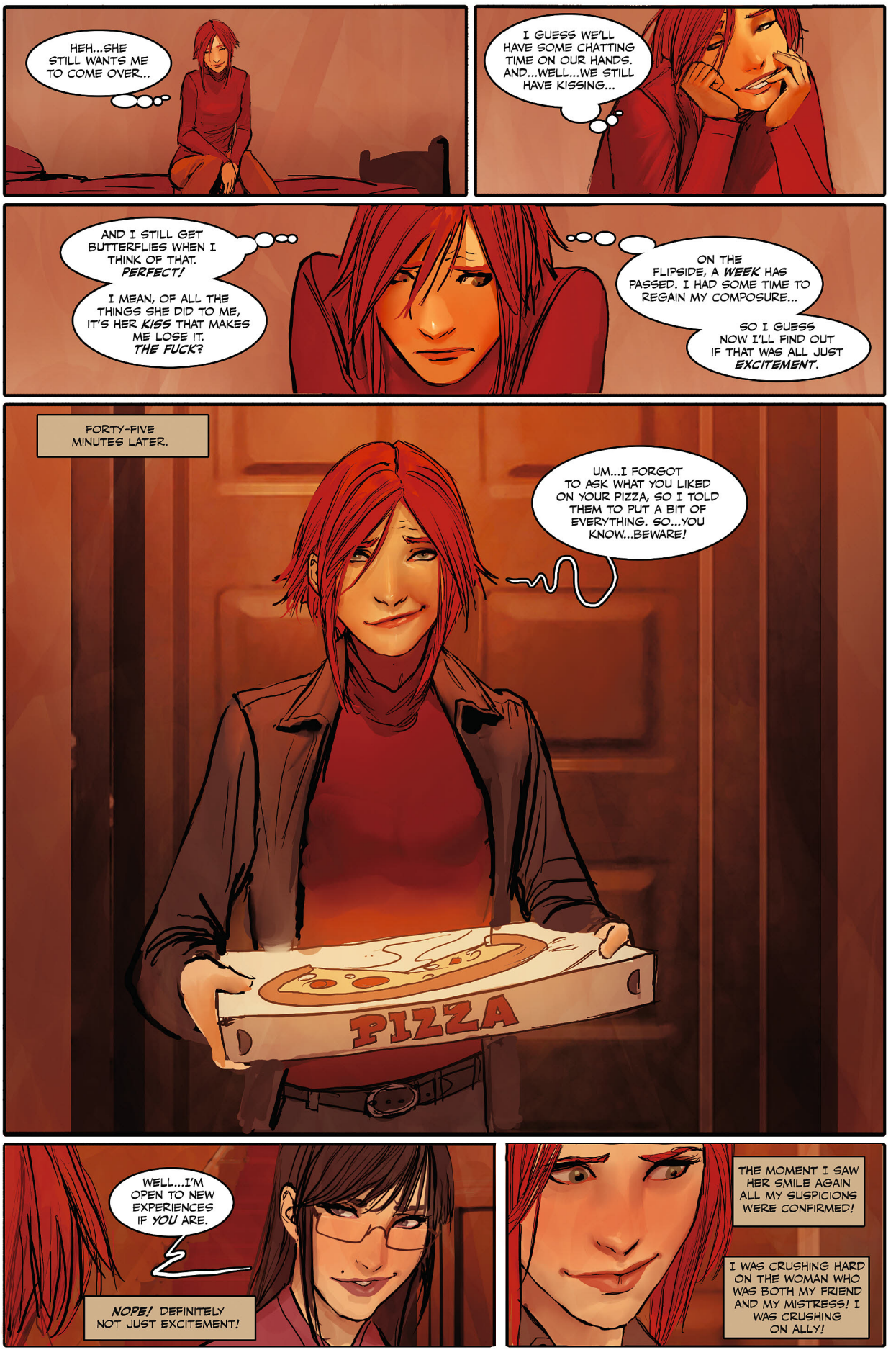

HEY, I'M NOT JUDGING, BUT THREE YEARS OF WORKING WITH YOU AND I *STILL* THINK THAT SEX DOESN'T NEED *FIXING!*
UGH...IT'S NOT *FIXING* IT... IT'S A MATTER OF *TASTES!*
HOW ARE WE STILL HAVING THIS FUCKING DISCUSSION?! IT'S THE SEXUAL EQUIVALENT OF LIKING GOURMET CUISINE!
YOU ARE SEXY WHEN YOU'RE MAD!
BITE ME, "WEASLEY!"
YOU KNOW I'M JUST FUCKING WITH YOU. IT'S FUN TO SEE YOU GETTING ALL DEFENSIVE. WORKS EVERY TIME! ANYWAY...
YOU CAN KEEP YOUR SEXUAL EQUIVALENT OF FROGS' LEGS FILLED WITH GOOSE LIVER. AS FOR ME, I'LL GO HOME TONIGHT AND GET A NICE JUICY STEAK WITH CLARICE.
HEH! REAL STEAK OR METHAPHORICAL?
FIRST REAL, THEN METHAPHORICAL.
NICE!
OH, SEEMS THE GIRLS ARE DONE.
YUP. TIME FOR SOME QUALITY CONTROL.
YOU DO LOVE YOUR JOB, HUH?
CAN'T COMPLAIN.
HONESTLY, WHEREVER THE HELL I GO THERE IS ALWAYS A LINE IN FRONT OF THE BATHROOM! I MEAN...I NEVER HAD ANY PENIS ENVY ISSUES, BUT YOU GOTTA ADMIT, IN THESE SITUATIONS...
IRINA MENTIONED THEY MIGHT NEED SOME DECORATIVE ELEMENTS DONE FOR THEIR V.I.P. SECTION. I TOLD HER TO TALK TO YOU.
SURE. I'LL TAKE CARE OF THAT.
HEY, IRINA. ARE THE GIRLS DECENT? CHRIS AND ALAN ARE HERE.
SEND THEM IN, BOB!
HEY, IRINA!
HI, CHRIS. SO, HARPER CALLED...
SO...FIRST TIME SUSPENSION. WAS EVERYTHING OKAY? ANY NUMBNESS ANYWHERE?
AW, LOOK AT HIM ALL WORRIED, CHRISTINE! THAT'S SO ADORABLE!
THAT I AM! BUT STILL, JUST IN CASE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO TAKE AN ASPIRIN.
ALREADY DID, BUT NO NEED REALLY. YOU GUYS DID A GREAT JOB WITH THE WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION.

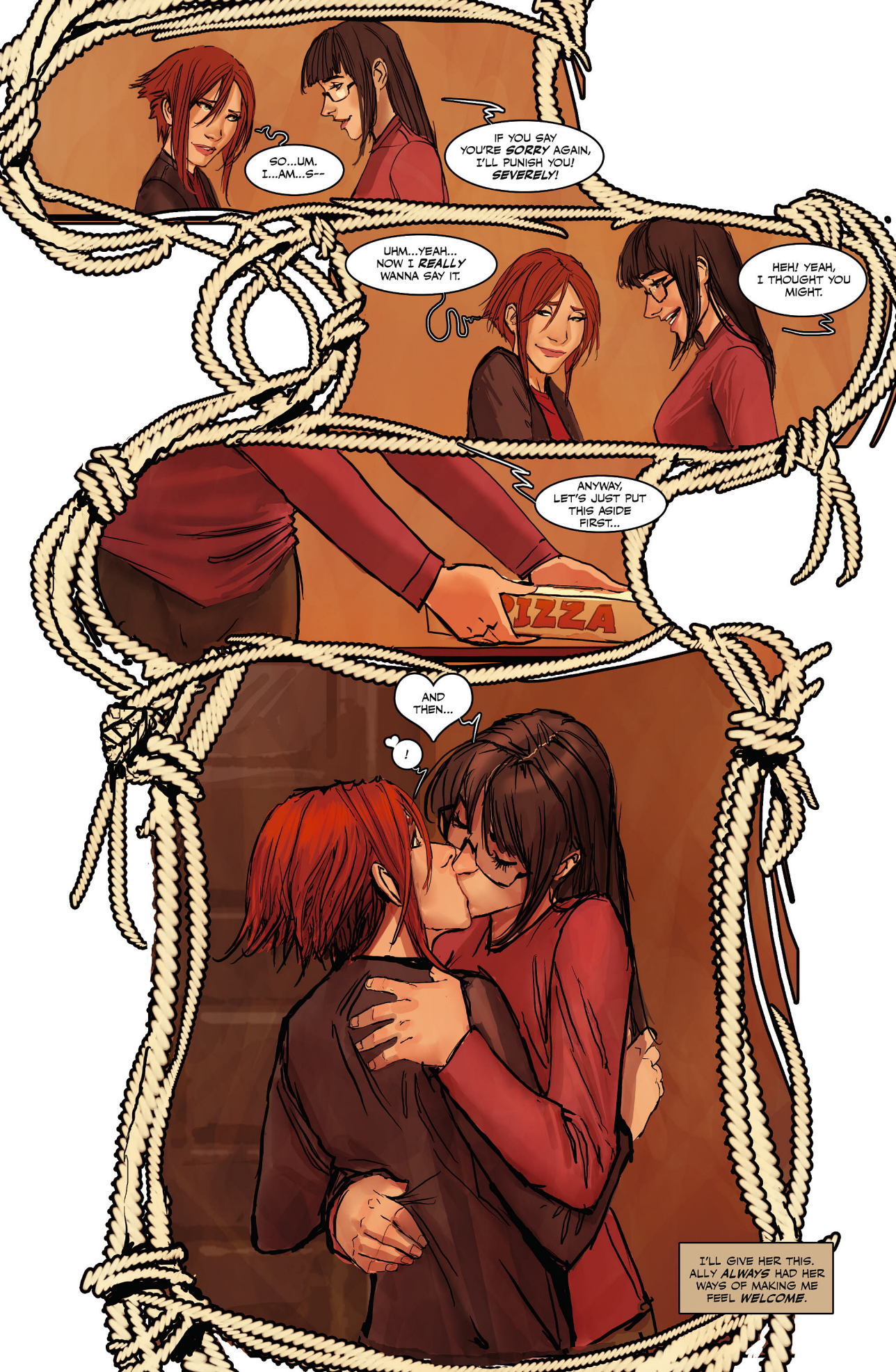

THAT'S ALL I NEEDED TO KNOW, JANE. I'LL BE OFF NOW. GIVE YOU GIRLS SOME..."PRIVACY."
THOUGH I WOULDN'T SAY NO TO SOME PHOTOS.
YOU DICK! I'VE GOT A BOYFRIEND.
OH, I'M SURE HE WOULDN'T MIND HAVING SOME PHOTOS EITHER.
DREAM ON, JACKASS!
HEH. SEE YOU NEXT WEEK, YOU TWO!
SEE YOU, ALAN!
OKAY, GET THIS. THIS COUPLE ASKED IRINA TO GIVE US THEIR CONTACT INFO--APPARENTLY THEY WOULD LIKE TO GET A SMALLER VERSION OF THE PERFORMANCE RIG.
NOT BAD. WANT ME TO GO MEET THEM?
SURE.
YOU GOING HOME NOW?
UH-HUH. GONNA DO SOME GAMING.
Y'KNOW...THIS PLACE IS PROBABLY LOADED WITH CHICKS SHARING YOUR... INTERESTS.
AS I SAID TO CASSIE, I'M FINE.
OKAY. JUST A SUGGESTION.
G'NIGHT, BOB.
SEE YA, GUYS.
OH YEAH... FORGOT TO ASK! DID ALLISON *LIKE* THE *BED*?
I'LL INVITE THEM OUT FOR *COFFEE* TOMORROW SO YOU CAN ASK HER YOURSELF.
THEM? SO SHE FOUND HERSELF A GUY?
NOPE!

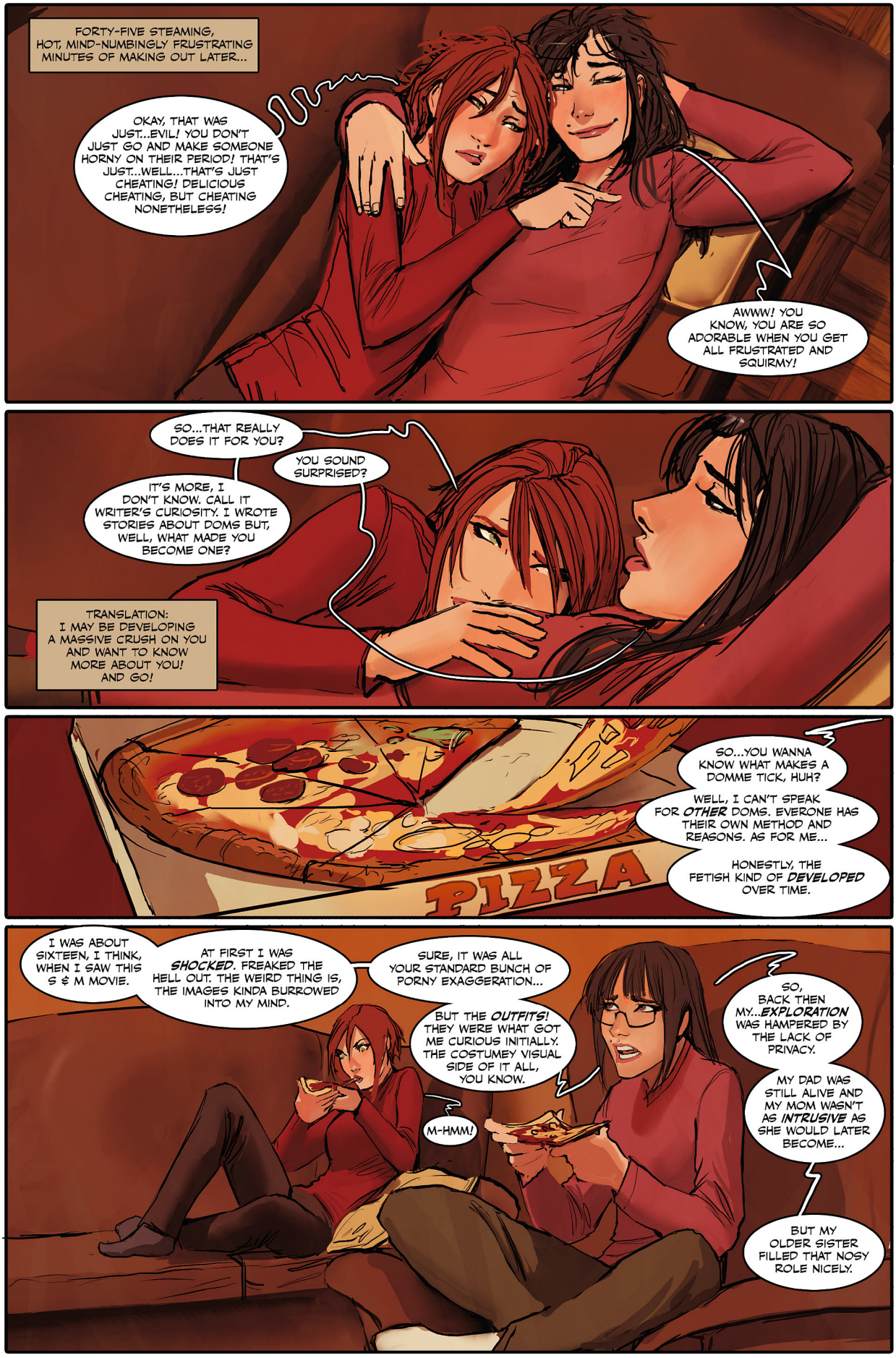

EARLIER THAT DAY.
NOTE TO SELF: AFTER THIS WEEKEND, INSIST ON SEEING HER SOONER. BECAUSE AFTER ALL THAT...
WAITING FOR FIVE DAYS IS FRIGGIN' CRUEL! AND BATTERIES AIN'T THAT DAMN CHEAP.
A FUNNY THING I REMEMBER ABOUT THAT DAY WAS MY OWN SMIRK...
IT WAS THE SMIRK OF SOMEONE THINKING, "I'MMA HAVE ALL THE CRAZY SEX TONIGHT!"
BUT...THE WAIT IS FINALLY OVER.
UGH...
YEAH... ABOUT THAT.
OH NO... PLEASE BE THE CHICKEN!
WAIT!
NONONONONONONONONONO!
AHEM... WELL.
EXCITEMENT HAS A WAY OF MAKING YOU *FORGET* THE MUNDANE REALITIES OF LIFE AT TIMES...
IT *DOESN'T STOP* THEM FROM HAPPENING.
SON OF A BITCH!
SUFFICE TO SAY...
IT *WASN'T* THE CHICKEN.

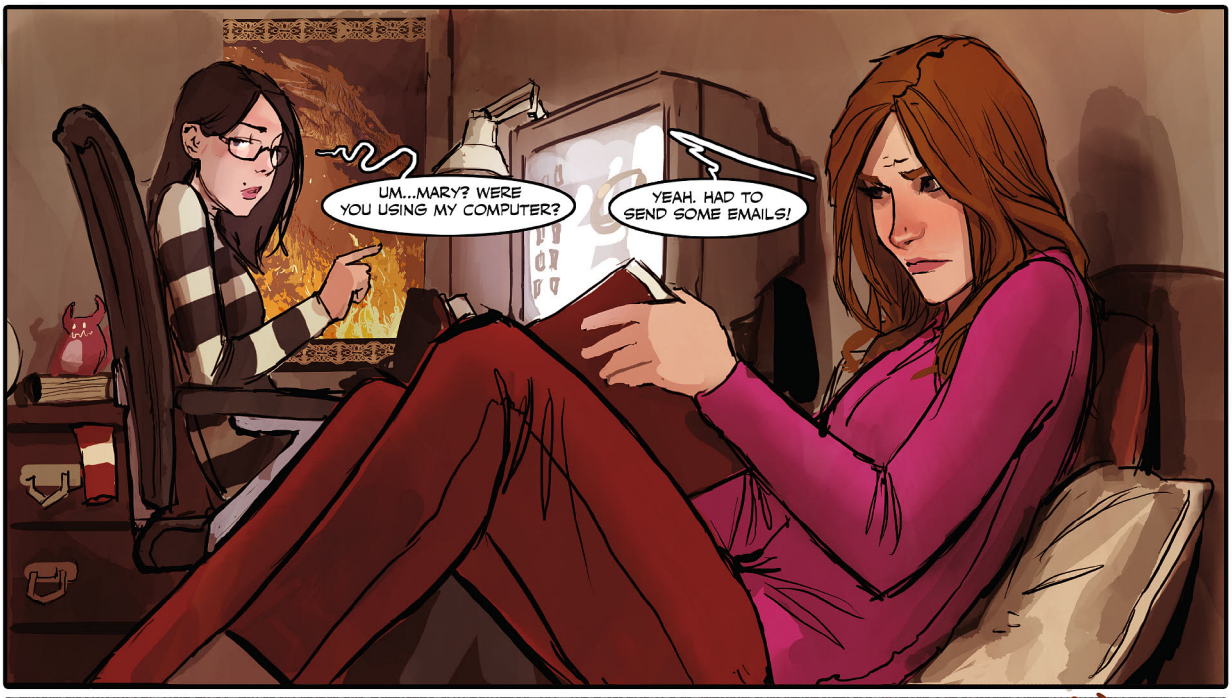

BARA-RING~
COMING!
GOOD EVENING! YOU HAVE REACHED THE PERSON WHO WILL OWN YOUR ASS TONIGHT! HOW MAY I HELP YOU?
HEY, ALLY.
'SCUSE ME, I DO BELIEVE TONIGHT I'LL BE GOING UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME!
YEAAAH...ABOUT THAT. I GOT IT...
GOT WHAT?
THE MONTHLY VISITOR...
OW...CRAP!
TROLLED BY MY OWN UTERUS!
YEAH, THAT... CHANGES THINGS A BIT.
SO...UM...RAINCHECK?
ARE YOU CRAZY?!
I'VE BEEN FIDGETY ALL WEEK HERE, REGRETTING THAT I SUGGESTED WE WAIT FOR THE WEEKEND. NO, NO, NO! YOU'RE GETTING YOUR CUTE BUTT OVER HERE. I'M NOT SPENDING THIS WEEKEND ALONE, AND NEITHER ARE YOU!
IS THAT AN ORDER?
BET YOUR ASS IT'S AN ORDER! COINCIDENTALLY, IT WOULD BE SO MUCH MORE EFFICIENT IF YOU COULD SEE ME NOW. HEH!
SORRY...
FOR WHAT?
Y'KNOW...RUINING WHAT WAS MOST LIKELY A METICULOUSLY PLANNED WEEKEND.
DON'T BE AN IDIOT!

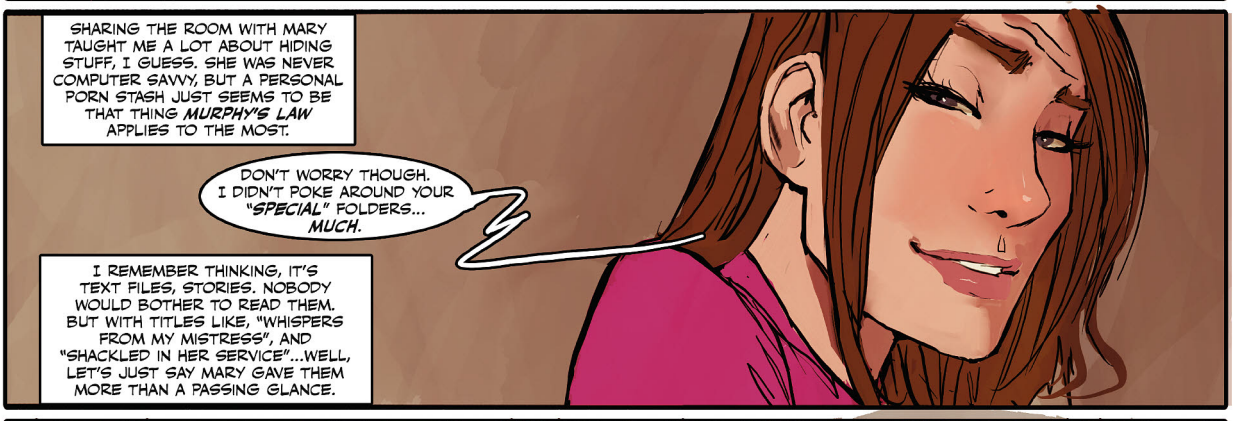
I MEAN, YEAH, I DID HAVE A "BATTLE PLAN" PREPARED, BUT THAT'S ONLY PARTIALLY WHY I WANT YOU TO COME OVER...
OKAY, OKAY. I'LL BE THERE IN THIRTY! WANT ME TO BRING A PIZZA?
SURE, AND I'LL FIND US A FINE, MIND-ROTTINGLY STUPID MOVIE!
IT'S A DATE!
UM...I MEAN...
SEE YOU, LISA!

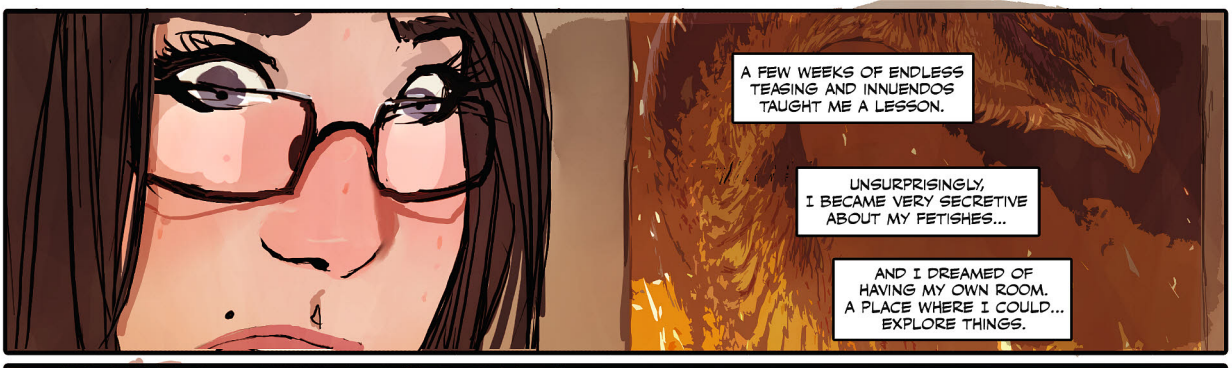

HEH...SHE STILL WANTS ME TO COME OVER...
I GUESS WE'LL HAVE SOME CHATTING TIME ON OUR HANDS. AND...WELL...WE STILL HAVE KISSING...
AND I STILL GET BUTTERFLIES WHEN I THINK OF THAT. PERFECT!
I MEAN, OF ALL THE THINGS SHE DID TO ME, IT'S HER KISS THAT MAKES ME LOSE IT. THE FUCK?
ON THE FLIPSIDE, A WEEK HAS PASSED. I HAD SOME TIME TO REGAIN MY COMPOSURE...
SO I GUESS NOW I'LL FIND OUT IF THAT WAS ALL JUST EXCITEMENT.
FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER.
UM...I FORGOT TO ASK WHAT YOU LIKED ON YOUR PIZZA, SO I TOLD THEM TO PUT A BIT OF EVERYTHING. SO...YOU KNOW...BEWARE!
PIZZA
WELL...I'M OPEN TO NEW EXPERIENCES IF YOU ARE.
NOPE! DEFINITELY NOT JUST EXCITEMENT!
THE MOMENT I SAW HER SMILE AGAIN ALL MY SUSPICIONS WERE CONFIRMED!
I WAS CRUSHING HARD ON THE WOMAN WHO WAS BOTH MY FRIEND AND MY MISTRESS! I WAS CRUSHING ON ALLY!

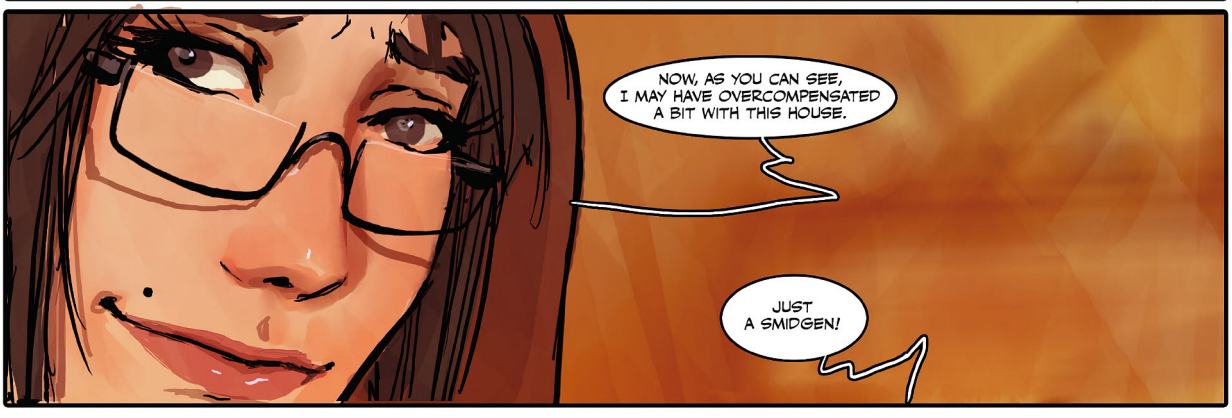

SO...UM. I...AM...S--
IF YOU SAY YOU'RE SORRY AGAIN, I'LL PUNISH YOU! SEVERELY!
UHM...YEAH... NOW I REALLY WANNA SAY IT.
HEH! YEAH, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT.
ANYWAY, LET'S JUST PUT THIS ASIDE FIRST...
PIZZA
AND THEN...
!
I'LL GIVE HER THIS. ALLY ALWAYS HAD HER WAYS OF MAKING ME FEEL WELCOME.

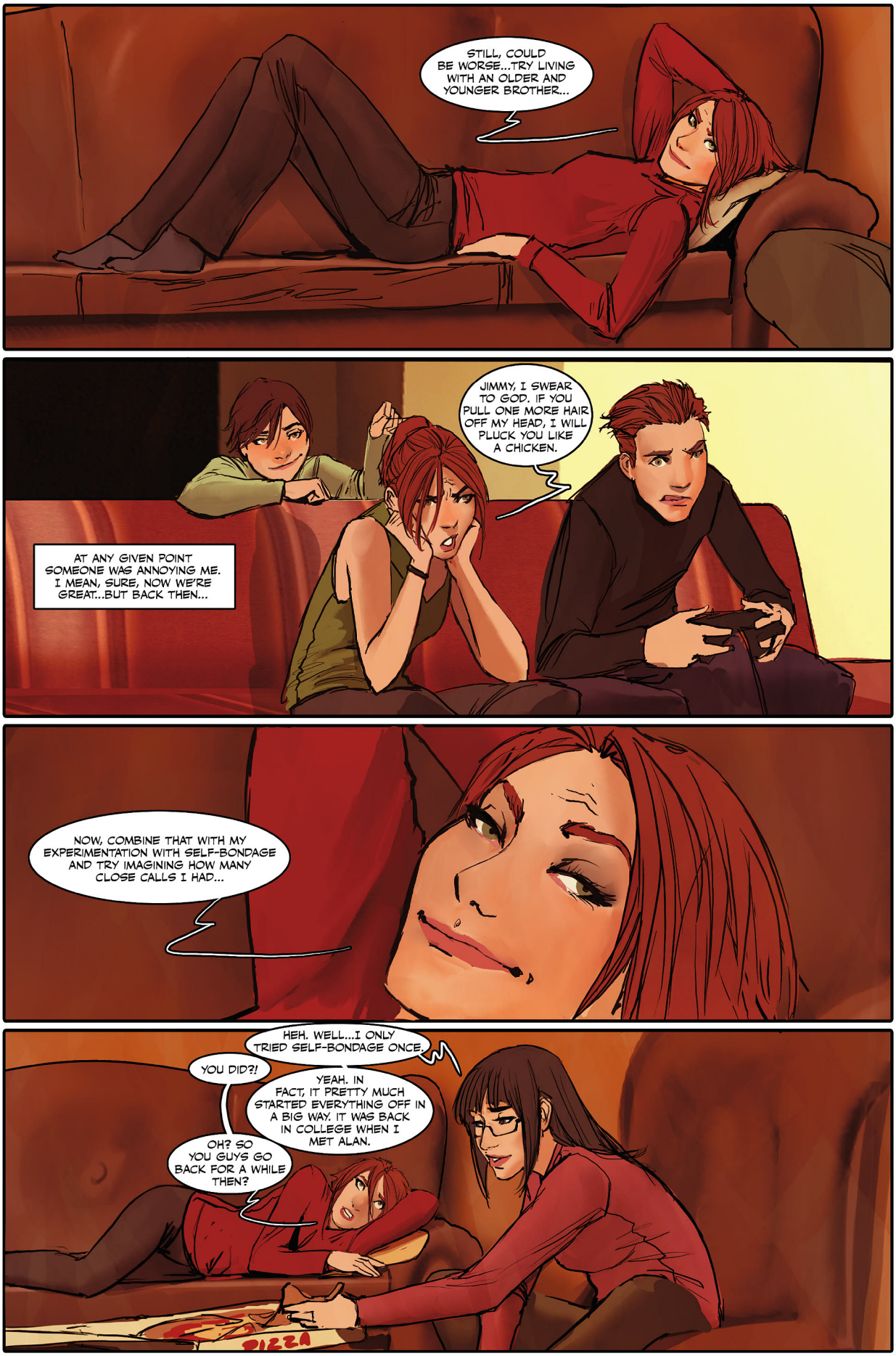

FORTY-FIVE STEAMING, HOT, MIND-NUMBINGLY FRUSTRATING MINUTES OF MAKING OUT LATER...
OKAY, THAT WAS JUST...EVIL! YOU DON'T JUST GO AND MAKE SOMEONE HORNY ON THEIR PERIOD! THAT'S JUST...WELL...THAT'S JUST CHEATING! DELICIOUS CHEATING, BUT CHEATING NONETHELESS!
AWWW! YOU KNOW, YOU ARE SO ADORABLE WHEN YOU GET ALL FRUSTRATED AND SQUIRMY!
SO...THAT REALLY DOES IT FOR YOU?
YOU SOUND SURPRISED?
IT'S MORE, I DON'T KNOW. CALL IT WRITER'S CURIOSITY. I WROTE STORIES ABOUT DOMS BUT, WELL, WHAT MADE YOU BECOME ONE?
TRANSLATION: I MAY BE DEVELOPING A MASSIVE CRUSH ON YOU AND WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU! AND GO!
PIZZA
SO...YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT MAKES A DOMME TICK, HUH?
WELL, I CAN'T SPEAK FOR OTHER DOMS. EVERONE HAS THEIR OWN METHOD AND REASONS. AS FOR ME...
HONESTLY, THE FETISH KIND OF DEVELOPED OVER TIME.
I WAS ABOUT SIXTEEN, I THINK, WHEN I SAW THIS S & M MOVIE.
AT FIRST I WAS SHOCKED. FREAKED THE HELL OUT. THE WEIRD THING IS, THE IMAGES KINDA BURROWED INTO MY MIND.
SURE, IT WAS ALL YOUR STANDARD BUNCH OF PORNY EXAGGERATION...
BUT THE OUTFITS! THEY WERE WHAT GOT ME CURIOUS INITIALLY. THE COSTUMEY VISUAL SIDE OF IT ALL, YOU KNOW.
M-HMM!
SO, BACK THEN MY...EXPLORATION WAS HAMPERED BY THE LACK OF PRIVACY.
MY DAD WAS STILL ALIVE AND MY MOM WASN'T AS INTRUSIVE AS SHE WOULD LATER BECOME...
BUT MY OLDER SISTER FILLED THAT NOSY ROLE NICELY.

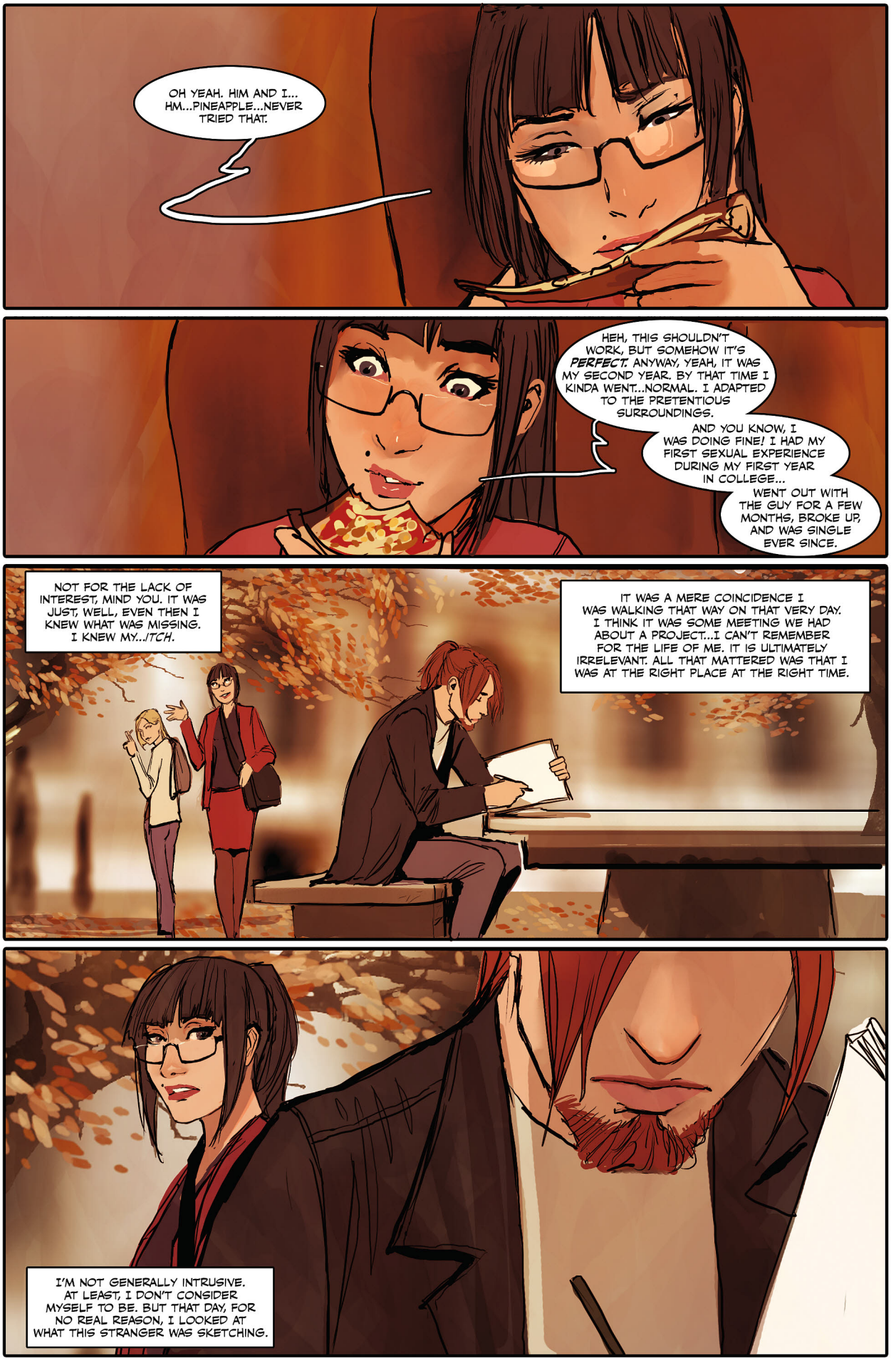

UM...MARY? WERE YOU USING MY COMPUTER?
YEAH. HAD TO SEND SOME EMAILS!

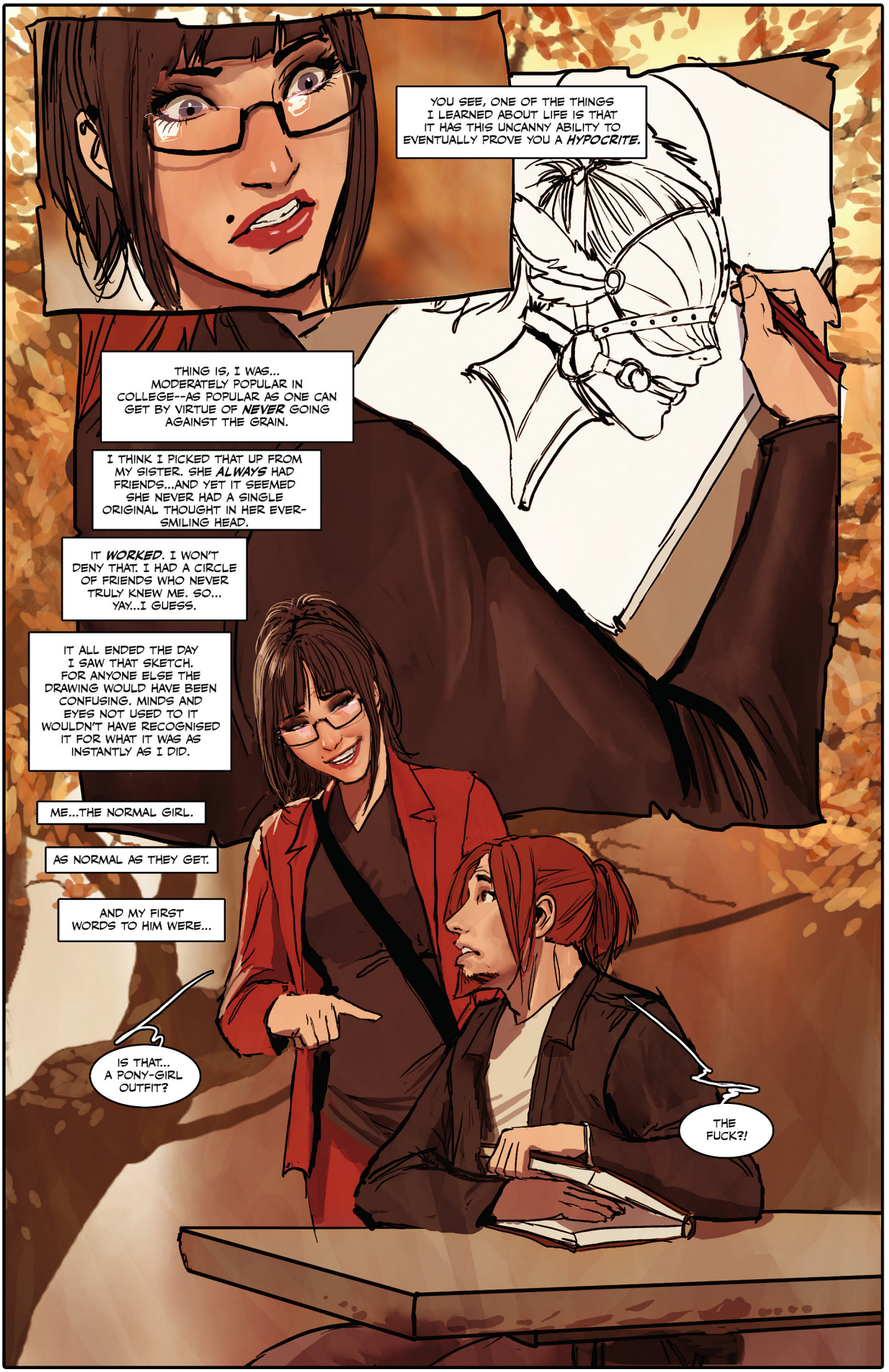

SHARING THE ROOM WITH MARY TAUGHT ME A LOT ABOUT HIDING STUFF, I GUESS. SHE WAS NEVER COMPUTER SAVVY, BUT A PERSONAL PORN STASH JUST SEEMS TO BE THAT THING MURPHY'S LAW APPLIES TO THE MOST.
DON'T WORRY THOUGH. I DIDN'T POKE AROUND YOUR "SPECIAL" FOLDERS... MUCH.
I REMEMBER THINKING, IT'S TEXT FILES, STORIES. NOBODY WOULD BOTHER TO READ THEM. BUT WITH TITLES LIKE, "WHISPERS FROM MY MISTRESS", AND "SHACKLED IN HER SERVICE"...WELL, LET'S JUST SAY MARY GAVE THEM MORE THAN A PASSING GLANCE.

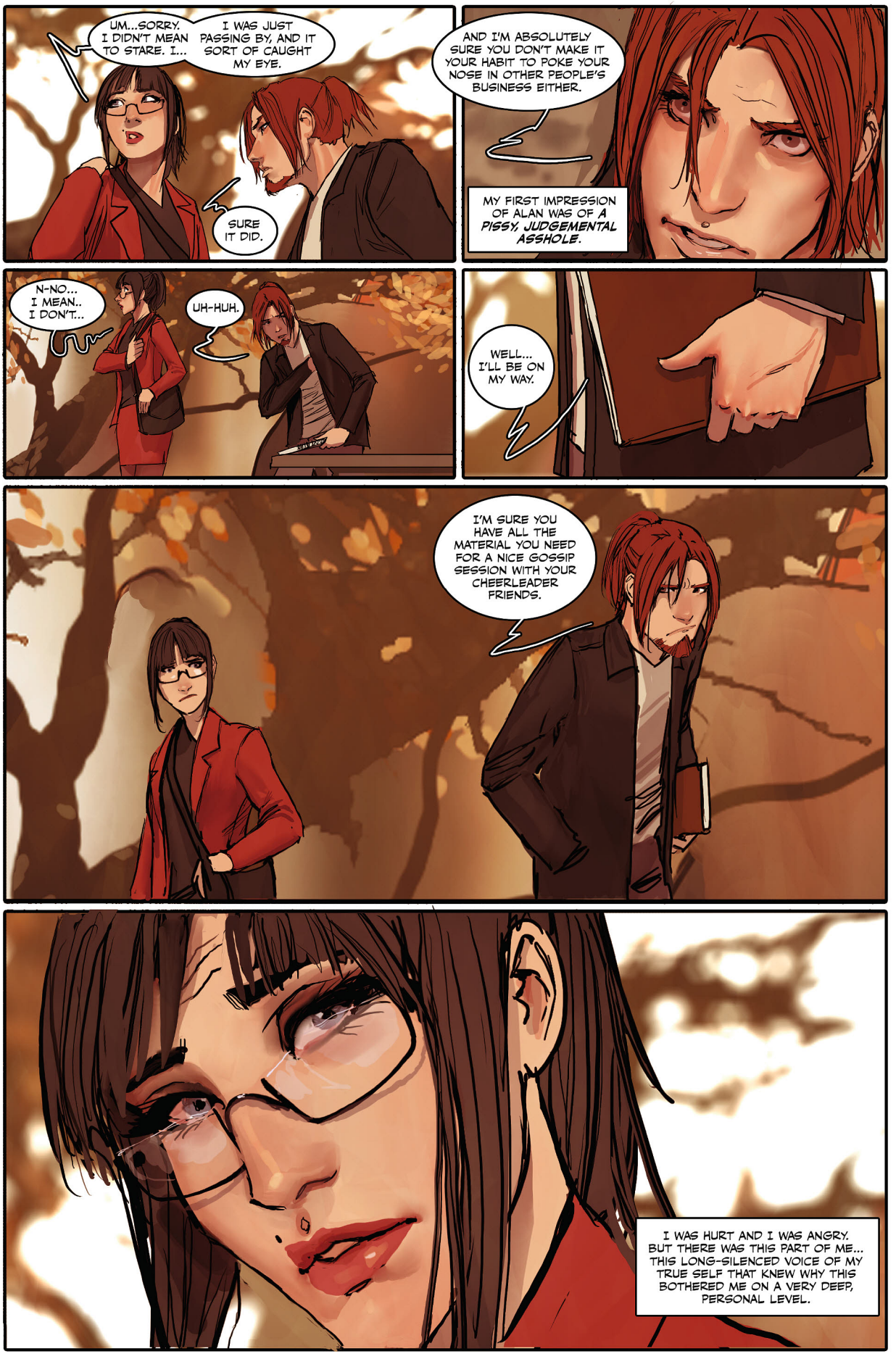

A FEW WEEKS OF ENDLESS TEASING AND INNUENDOS TAUGHT ME A LESSON.
UNSURPRISINGLY, I BECAME VERY SECRETIVE ABOUT MY FETISHES...
AND I DREAMED OF HAVING MY OWN ROOM. A PLACE WHERE I COULD... EXPLORE THINGS.

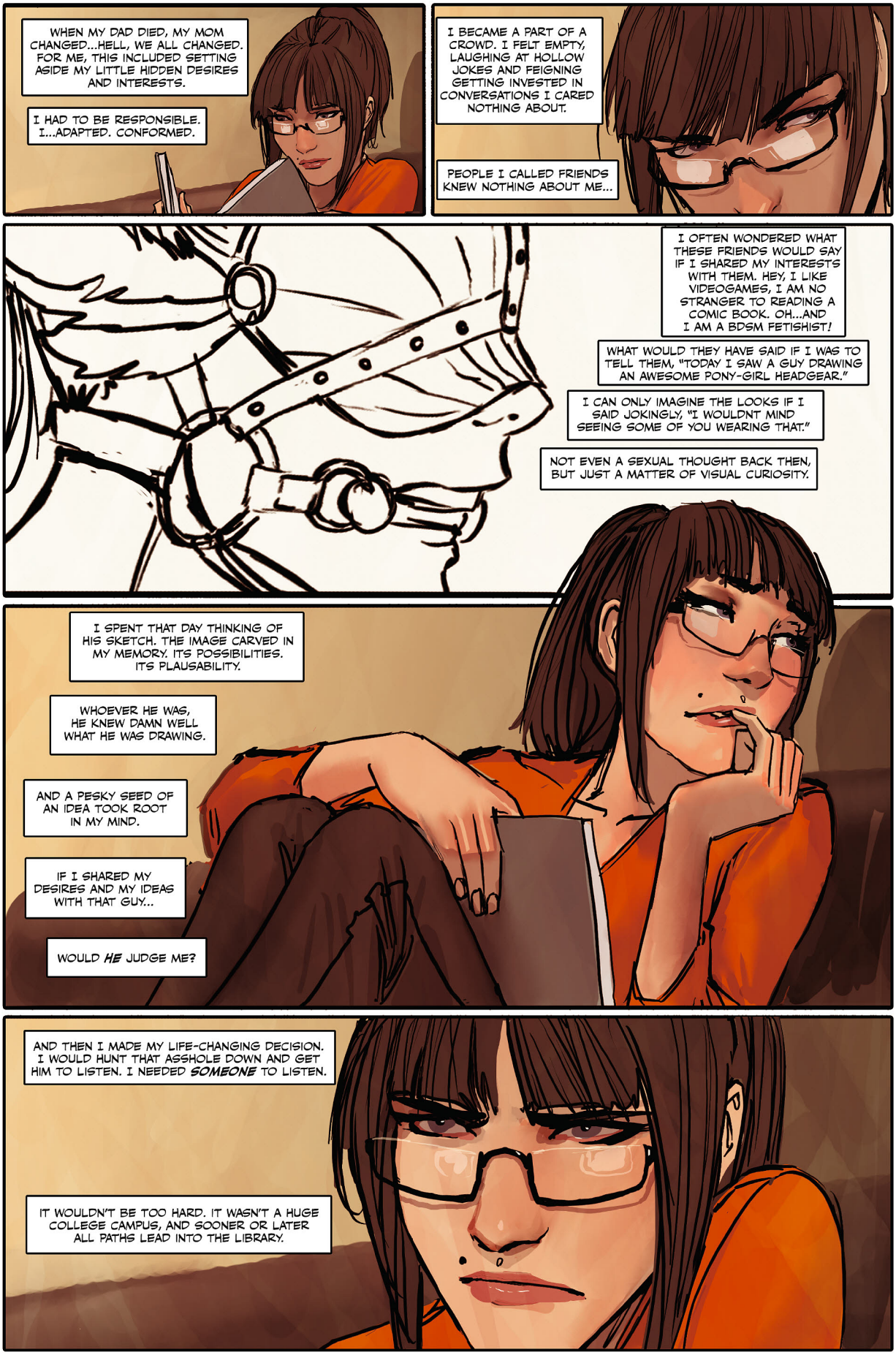

NOW, AS YOU CAN SEE, I MAY HAVE OVERCOMPENSATED A BIT WITH THIS HOUSE.
JUST A SMIDGEN!

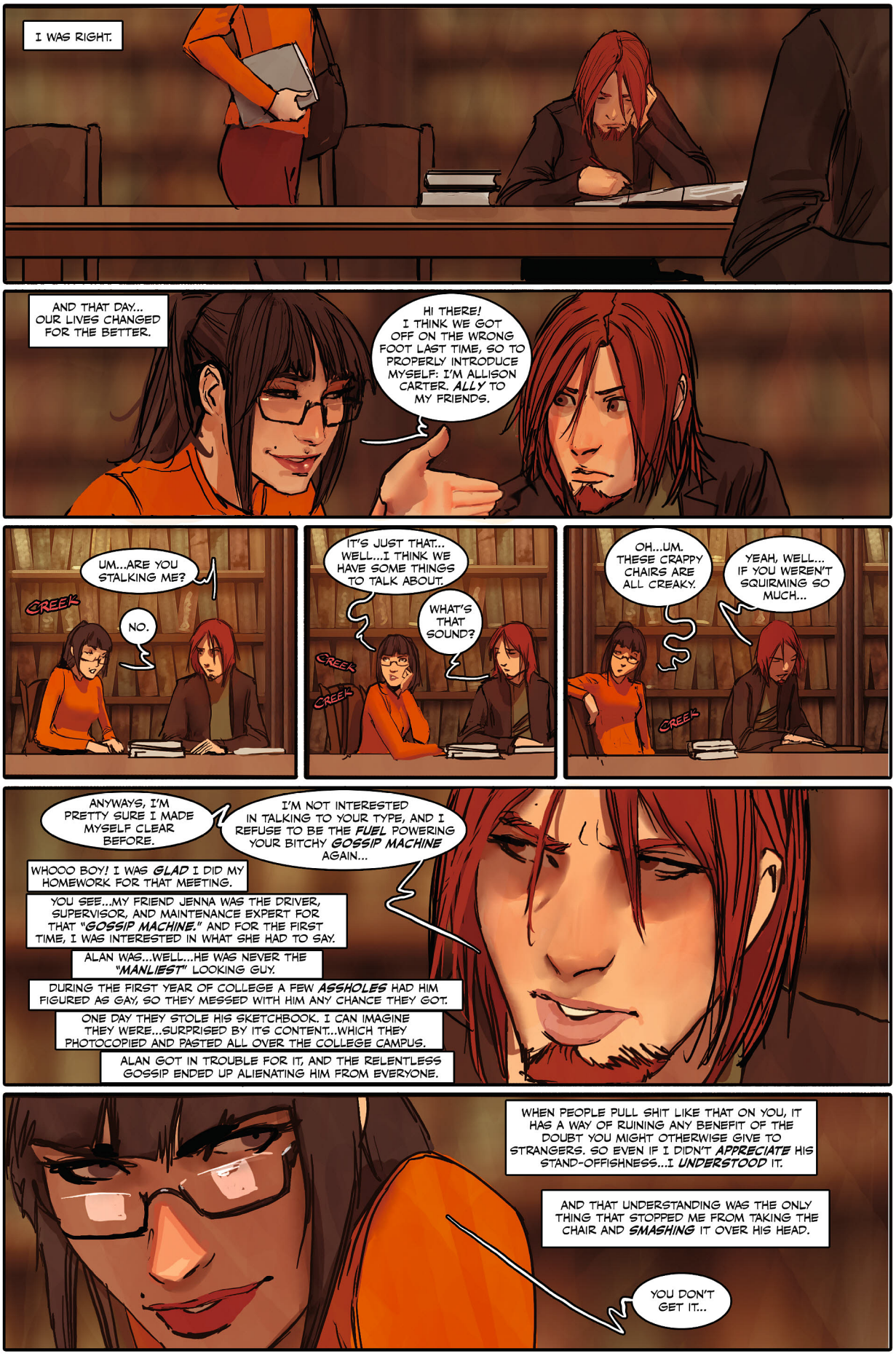

STILL, COULD BE WORSE...TRY LIVING WITH AN OLDER AND YOUNGER BROTHER...
JIMMY, I SWEAR TO GOD. IF YOU PULL ONE MORE HAIR OFF MY HEAD, I WILL PLUCK YOU LIKE A CHICKEN.
AT ANY GIVEN POINT SOMEONE WAS ANNOYING ME. I MEAN, SURE, NOW WE'RE GREAT...BUT BACK THEN...
NOW, COMBINE THAT WITH MY EXPERIMENTATION WITH SELF-BONDAGE AND TRY IMAGINING HOW MANY CLOSE CALLS I HAD...
HEH. WELL...I ONLY TRIED SELF-BONDAGE ONCE.
YOU DID?!
YEAH. IN FACT, IT PRETTY MUCH STARTED EVERYTHING OFF IN A BIG WAY. IT WAS BACK IN COLLEGE WHEN I MET ALAN.
OH? SO YOU GUYS GO BACK FOR A WHILE THEN?
PIZZA


OH YEAH. HIM AND I... HM...PINEAPPLE...NEVER TRIED THAT.
HEH, THIS SHOULDN'T WORK, BUT SOMEHOW IT'S *PERFECT.* ANYWAY, YEAH, IT WAS MY SECOND YEAR. BY THAT TIME I KINDA WENT...NORMAL. I ADAPTED TO THE PRETENTIOUS SURROUNDINGS.
AND YOU KNOW, I WAS DOING FINE! I HAD MY FIRST SEXUAL EXPERIENCE DURING MY FIRST YEAR IN COLLEGE...
WENT OUT WITH THE GUY FOR A FEW MONTHS, BROKE UP, AND WAS SINGLE EVER SINCE.
NOT FOR THE LACK OF INTEREST, MIND YOU. IT WAS JUST, WELL, EVEN THEN I KNEW WHAT WAS MISSING. I KNEW MY...*ITCH.*
IT WAS A MERE COINCIDENCE I WAS WALKING THAT WAY ON THAT VERY DAY. I THINK IT WAS SOME MEETING WE HAD ABOUT A PROJECT...I CAN'T REMEMBER FOR THE LIFE OF ME. IT IS ULTIMATELY IRRELEVANT. ALL THAT MATTERED WAS THAT I WAS AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.
I'M NOT GENERALLY INTRUSIVE. AT LEAST, I DON'T CONSIDER MYSELF TO BE. BUT THAT DAY, FOR NO REAL REASON, I LOOKED AT WHAT THIS STRANGER WAS SKETCHING.


YOU SEE, ONE OF THE THINGS I LEARNED ABOUT LIFE IS THAT IT HAS THIS UNCANNY ABILITY TO EVENTUALLY PROVE YOU A HYPOCRITE.
THING IS, I WAS... MODERATELY POPULAR IN COLLEGE--AS POPULAR AS ONE CAN GET BY VIRTUE OF NEVER GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN.
I THINK I PICKED THAT UP FROM MY SISTER. SHE ALWAYS HAD FRIENDS...AND YET IT SEEMED SHE NEVER HAD A SINGLE ORIGINAL THOUGHT IN HER EVER-SMILING HEAD.
IT WORKED. I WON'T DENY THAT. I HAD A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WHO NEVER TRULY KNEW ME. SO... YAY...I GUESS.
IT ALL ENDED THE DAY I SAW THAT SKETCH. FOR ANYONE ELSE THE DRAWING WOULD HAVE BEEN CONFUSING. MINDS AND EYES NOT USED TO IT WOULDN'T HAVE RECOGNISED IT FOR WHAT IT WAS AS INSTANTLY AS I DID.
ME...THE NORMAL GIRL.
AS NORMAL AS THEY GET.
AND MY FIRST WORDS TO HIM WERE...
IS THAT... A PONY-GIRL OUTFIT?
THE FUCK?!

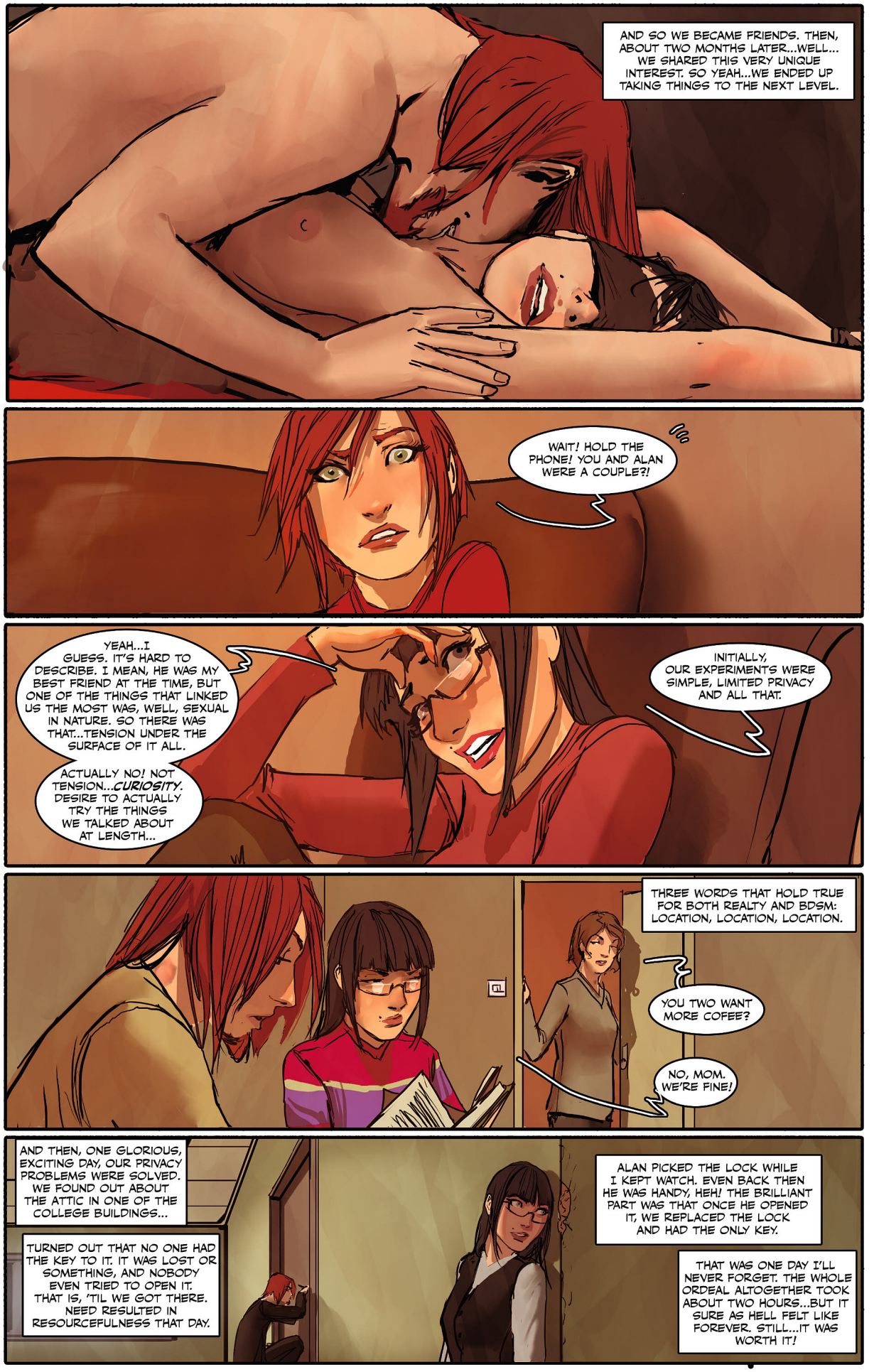

UM...SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO STARE. I...
I WAS JUST PASSING BY, AND IT SORT OF CAUGHT MY EYE.
SURE IT DID.
AND I'M ABSOLUTELY SURE YOU DON'T MAKE IT YOUR HABIT TO POKE YOUR NOSE IN OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS EITHER.
MY FIRST IMPRESSION OF ALAN WAS OF A PISSY, JUDGEMENTAL ASSHOLE.
N-NO... I MEAN.. I DON'T...
UH-HUH.
WELL... I'LL BE ON MY WAY.
I'M SURE YOU HAVE ALL THE MATERIAL YOU NEED FOR A NICE GOSSIP SESSION WITH YOUR CHEERLEADER FRIENDS.
I WAS HURT AND I WAS ANGRY. BUT THERE WAS THIS PART OF ME... THIS LONG-SILENCED VOICE OF MY TRUE SELF THAT KNEW WHY THIS BOTHERED ME ON A VERY DEEP, PERSONAL LEVEL.

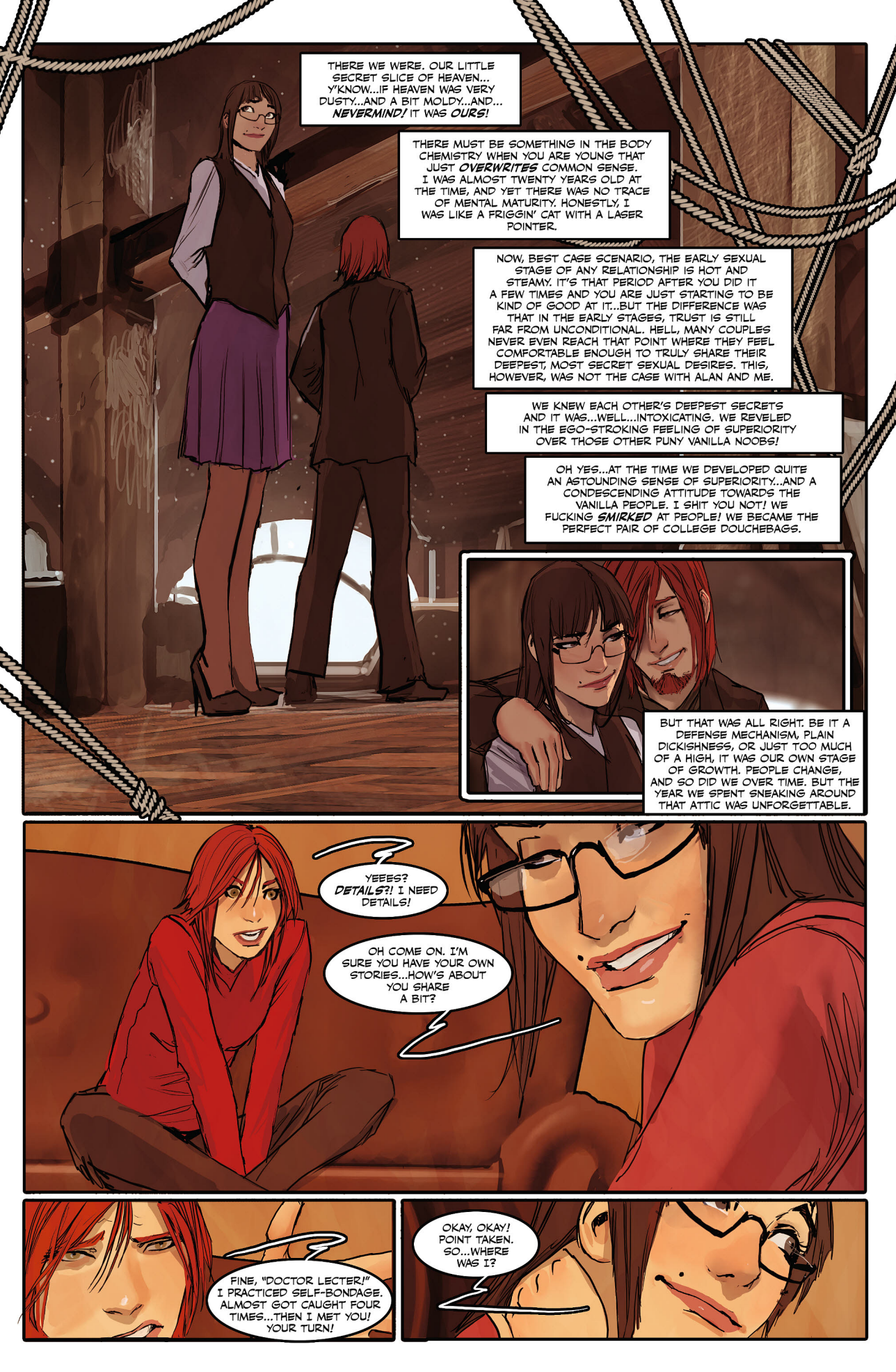

WHEN MY DAD DIED, MY MOM CHANGED...HELL, WE ALL CHANGED. FOR ME, THIS INCLUDED SETTING ASIDE MY LITTLE HIDDEN DESIRES AND INTERESTS.
I HAD TO BE RESPONSIBLE. I...ADAPTED. CONFORMED.
I BECAME A PART OF A CROWD. I FELT EMPTY, LAUGHING AT HOLLOW JOKES AND FEIGNING GETTING INVESTED IN CONVERSATIONS I CARED NOTHING ABOUT.
PEOPLE I CALLED FRIENDS KNEW NOTHING ABOUT ME...
I OFTEN WONDERED WHAT THESE FRIENDS WOULD SAY IF I SHARED MY INTERESTS WITH THEM. HEY, I LIKE VIDEOGAMES, I AM NO STRANGER TO READING A COMIC BOOK. OH...AND I AM A BDSM FETISHIST!
WHAT WOULD THEY HAVE SAID IF I WAS TO TELL THEM, "TODAY I SAW A GUY DRAWING AN AWESOME PONY-GIRL HEADGEAR."
I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE LOOKS IF I SAID JOKINGLY, "I WOULDNT MIND SEEING SOME OF YOU WEARING THAT."
NOT EVEN A SEXUAL THOUGHT BACK THEN, BUT JUST A MATTER OF VISUAL CURIOSITY.
I SPENT THAT DAY THINKING OF HIS SKETCH. THE IMAGE CARVED IN MY MEMORY. ITS POSSIBILITIES. ITS PLAUSABILITY.
WHOEVER HE WAS, HE KNEW DAMN WELL WHAT HE WAS DRAWING.
AND A PESKY SEED OF AN IDEA TOOK ROOT IN MY MIND.
IF I SHARED MY DESIRES AND MY IDEAS WITH THAT GUY...
WOULD *HE* JUDGE ME?
AND THEN I MADE MY LIFE-CHANGING DECISION. I WOULD HUNT THAT ASSHOLE DOWN AND GET HIM TO LISTEN. I NEEDED *SOMEONE* TO LISTEN.
IT WOULDN'T BE TOO HARD. IT WASN'T A HUGE COLLEGE CAMPUS, AND SOONER OR LATER ALL PATHS LEAD INTO THE LIBRARY.


I WAS RIGHT.
AND THAT DAY... OUR LIVES CHANGED FOR THE BETTER.
HI THERE! I THINK WE GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT LAST TIME, SO TO PROPERLY INTRODUCE MYSELF: I'M ALLISON CARTER. ALLY TO MY FRIENDS.
UM...ARE YOU STALKING ME?
CREEK
NO.
IT'S JUST THAT... WELL...I THINK WE HAVE SOME THINGS TO TALK ABOUT.
WHAT'S THAT SOUND?
CREEK
CREEK
OH...UM. THESE CRAPPY CHAIRS ARE ALL CREAKY.
YEAH, WELL... IF YOU WEREN'T SQUIRMING SO MUCH...
CREEK
ANYWAYS, I'M PRETTY SURE I MADE MYSELF CLEAR BEFORE.
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN TALKING TO YOUR TYPE, AND I REFUSE TO BE THE FUEL POWERING YOUR BITCHY GOSSIP MACHINE AGAIN...
WHOOO BOY! I WAS GLAD I DID MY HOMEWORK FOR THAT MEETING.
YOU SEE...MY FRIEND JENNA WAS THE DRIVER, SUPERVISOR, AND MAINTENANCE EXPERT FOR THAT "GOSSIP MACHINE." AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WAS INTERESTED IN WHAT SHE HAD TO SAY.
ALAN WAS...WELL...HE WAS NEVER THE "MANLIEST" LOOKING GUY.
DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE A FEW ASSHOLES HAD HIM FIGURED AS GAY, SO THEY MESSED WITH HIM ANY CHANCE THEY GOT.
ONE DAY THEY STOLE HIS SKETCHBOOK. I CAN IMAGINE THEY WERE...SURPRISED BY ITS CONTENT...WHICH THEY PHOTOCOPIED AND PASTED ALL OVER THE COLLEGE CAMPUS.
ALAN GOT IN TROUBLE FOR IT, AND THE RELENTLESS GOSSIP ENDED UP ALIENATING HIM FROM EVERYONE.
WHEN PEOPLE PULL SHIT LIKE THAT ON YOU, IT HAS A WAY OF RUINING ANY BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT YOU MIGHT OTHERWISE GIVE TO STRANGERS. SO EVEN IF I DIDN'T APPRECIATE HIS STAND-OFFISHNESS...I UNDERSTOOD IT.
AND THAT UNDERSTANDING WAS THE ONLY THING THAT STOPPED ME FROM TAKING THE CHAIR AND SMASHING IT OVER HIS HEAD.
YOU DON'T GET IT...

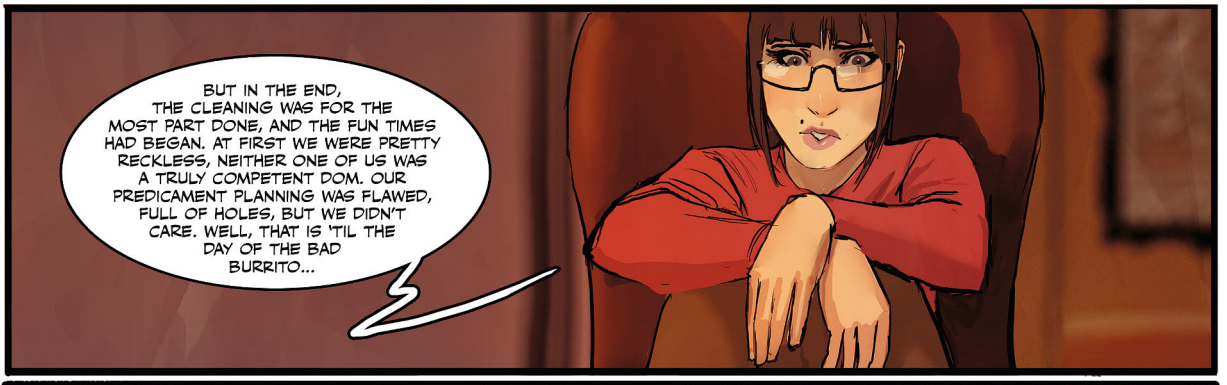
NO...YOU DON'T SEEM TO GET IT. GO LOOK FOR ENTERTAINMENT SOMEWHERE ELSE, I'M *FRESH OUT*!
I HONESTLY CAN'T REMEMBER IF I EVER...WELL...BEFORE MEETING YOU THAT IS, DID ANYTHING SO FOOLHARDY AS WHAT I DID THAT DAY.
OH FOR FUCK'S SAKE! WHAT'S YOUR MALFUNCTION? THIS SERIOUSLY CONSTITUTES HARASSMENT AT THIS POINT!
JUST GIVE ME ONE MINUTE OF YOUR TIME, AND IF YOU STILL WANT ME TO LEAVE BY THEN, I WILL DO SO. *OKAY?*
IF I STILL WANT YOU TO LEAVE?

OKAY, HERE. HOLD THIS.
HUH?
A CAMERA?
OKAY, DUMBASS... TAKE A PICTURE! AND HOPEFULLY THIS WILL MAKE THE MESSAGE CLEAR. WE DO HAVE STUFF TO TALK ABOUT...
OH, AND HURRY. I SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE CAMELTOE I AM SPORTING UNDER MY JEANS.
IT TOOK ME OVER AN HOUR TO GET MYSELF WRAPPED UP IN ROPE LIKE THAT.
OVER AN HOUR IN THE BATHROOM FAKING AN EPIC CASE OF CONSTIPATION WHILE TRYING TO NAIL AN INTERNET-LEARNED ROPE SETUP. ALL THAT WITH MY MOM KNOCKING EVERY NOW AND THEN TO CHECK IF I'M DONE 'CAUSE SHE NEEDED TO USE THE BATHROOM.
THERE WAS ALSO THE LITTLE PROBLEM I REALISED TOO LATE. THIS KIND OF BONDAGE REALLY TENDS TO...DIG IN... WHEN DONE RIGHT. AND I DID A PRETTY DECENT JOB IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF.
BUT THE LOOK ON ALAN'S FACE...
PRICELESS!
I...UM... WOW.
FLASH
SORRY. I PRESSED THE BUTTON BY ACCIDENT.
SURE YOU DID.

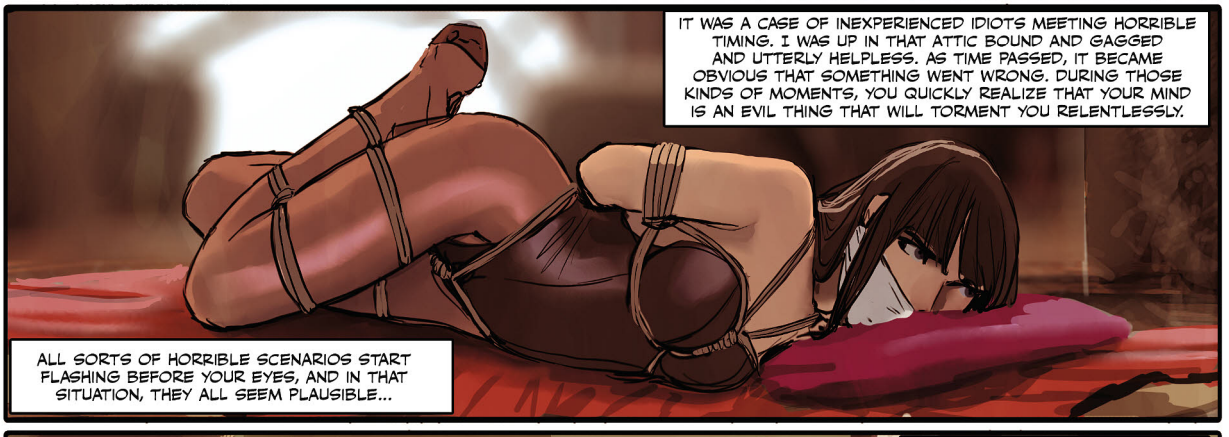

AND SO WE BECAME FRIENDS. THEN, ABOUT TWO MONTHS LATER...WELL... WE SHARED THIS VERY UNIQUE INTEREST. SO YEAH...WE ENDED UP TAKING THINGS TO THE NEXT LEVEL.
WAIT! HOLD THE PHONE! YOU AND ALAN WERE A COUPLE?!
YEAH...I GUESS. IT'S HARD TO DESCRIBE. I MEAN, HE WAS MY BEST FRIEND AT THE TIME, BUT ONE OF THE THINGS THAT LINKED US THE MOST WAS, WELL, SEXUAL IN NATURE. SO THERE WAS THAT...TENSION UNDER THE SURFACE OF IT ALL.
ACTUALLY NO! NOT TENSION...*CURIOSITY*. DESIRE TO ACTUALLY TRY THE THINGS WE TALKED ABOUT AT LENGTH...
INITIALLY, OUR EXPERIMENTS WERE SIMPLE, LIMITED PRIVACY AND ALL THAT.
THREE WORDS THAT HOLD TRUE FOR BOTH REALTY AND BDSM: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.
YOU TWO WANT MORE COFEE?
NO, MOM. WE'RE FINE!
AND THEN, ONE GLORIOUS, EXCITING DAY, OUR PRIVACY PROBLEMS WERE SOLVED. WE FOUND OUT ABOUT THE ATTIC IN ONE OF THE COLLEGE BUILDINGS...
TURNED OUT THAT NO ONE HAD THE KEY TO IT. IT WAS LOST OR SOMETHING, AND NOBODY EVEN TRIED TO OPEN IT. THAT IS, 'TIL WE GOT THERE. NEED RESULTED IN RESOURCEFULNESS THAT DAY.
ALAN PICKED THE LOCK WHILE I KEPT WATCH. EVEN BACK THEN HE WAS HANDY, HEH! THE BRILLIANT PART WAS THAT ONCE HE OPENED IT, WE REPLACED THE LOCK AND HAD THE ONLY KEY.
THAT WAS ONE DAY I'LL NEVER FORGET. THE WHOLE ORDEAL ALTOGETHER TOOK ABOUT TWO HOURS...BUT IT SURE AS HELL FELT LIKE FOREVER. STILL...IT WAS WORTH IT!


THERE WE WERE. OUR LITTLE SECRET SLICE OF HEAVEN... Y'KNOW...IF HEAVEN WAS VERY DUSTY...AND A BIT MOLDY...AND... NEVERMIND! IT WAS OURS!
THERE MUST BE SOMETHING IN THE BODY CHEMISTRY WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG THAT JUST OVERWRITES COMMON SENSE. I WAS ALMOST TWENTY YEARS OLD AT THE TIME, AND YET THERE WAS NO TRACE OF MENTAL MATURITY. HONESTLY, I WAS LIKE A FRIGGIN' CAT WITH A LASER POINTER.
NOW, BEST CASE SCENARIO, THE EARLY SEXUAL STAGE OF ANY RELATIONSHIP IS HOT AND STEAMY. IT'S THAT PERIOD AFTER YOU DID IT A FEW TIMES AND YOU ARE JUST STARTING TO BE KIND OF GOOD AT IT...BUT THE DIFFERENCE WAS THAT IN THE EARLY STAGES, TRUST IS STILL FAR FROM UNCONDITIONAL. HELL, MANY COUPLES NEVER EVEN REACH THAT POINT WHERE THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO TRULY SHARE THEIR DEEPEST, MOST SECRET SEXUAL DESIRES. THIS, HOWEVER, WAS NOT THE CASE WITH ALAN AND ME.
WE KNEW EACH OTHER'S DEEPEST SECRETS AND IT WAS...WELL...INTOXICATING. WE REVELED IN THE EGO-STROKING FEELING OF SUPERIORITY OVER THOSE OTHER PUNY VANILLA NOOBS!
OH YES...AT THE TIME WE DEVELOPED QUITE AN ASTOUNDING SENSE OF SUPERIORITY...AND A CONDESCENDING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VANILLA PEOPLE. I SHIT YOU NOT! WE FUCKING SMIRKED AT PEOPLE! WE BECAME THE PERFECT PAIR OF COLLEGE DOUCHEBAGS.
BUT THAT WAS ALL RIGHT. BE IT A DEFENSE MECHANISM, PLAIN DICKISHNESS, OR JUST TOO MUCH OF A HIGH, IT WAS OUR OWN STAGE OF GROWTH. PEOPLE CHANGE, AND SO DID WE OVER TIME. BUT THE YEAR WE SPENT SNEAKING AROUND THAT ATTIC WAS UNFORGETTABLE.
YEEES? DETAILS?! I NEED DETAILS!
OH COME ON. I'M SURE YOU HAVE YOUR OWN STORIES...HOW'S ABOUT YOU SHARE A BIT?
FINE, "DOCTOR LECTER!" I PRACTICED SELF-BONDAGE. ALMOST GOT CAUGHT FOUR TIMES...THEN I MET YOU! YOUR TURN!
OKAY, OKAY! POINT TAKEN. SO...WHERE WAS I?

AH YES...THAT FIRST WEEK WAS ALL WORK AND NO PLAY FOR US. BETWEN SMUGGLING CLEANING SUPPLIES, AND USING FREE TIME BETWEEN LESSONS TO ACTUALLY CLEAN THE ATTIC, WE WERE GENERALLY TOO EXHAUSTED TO GET OUR LITTLE GAMES GOING.

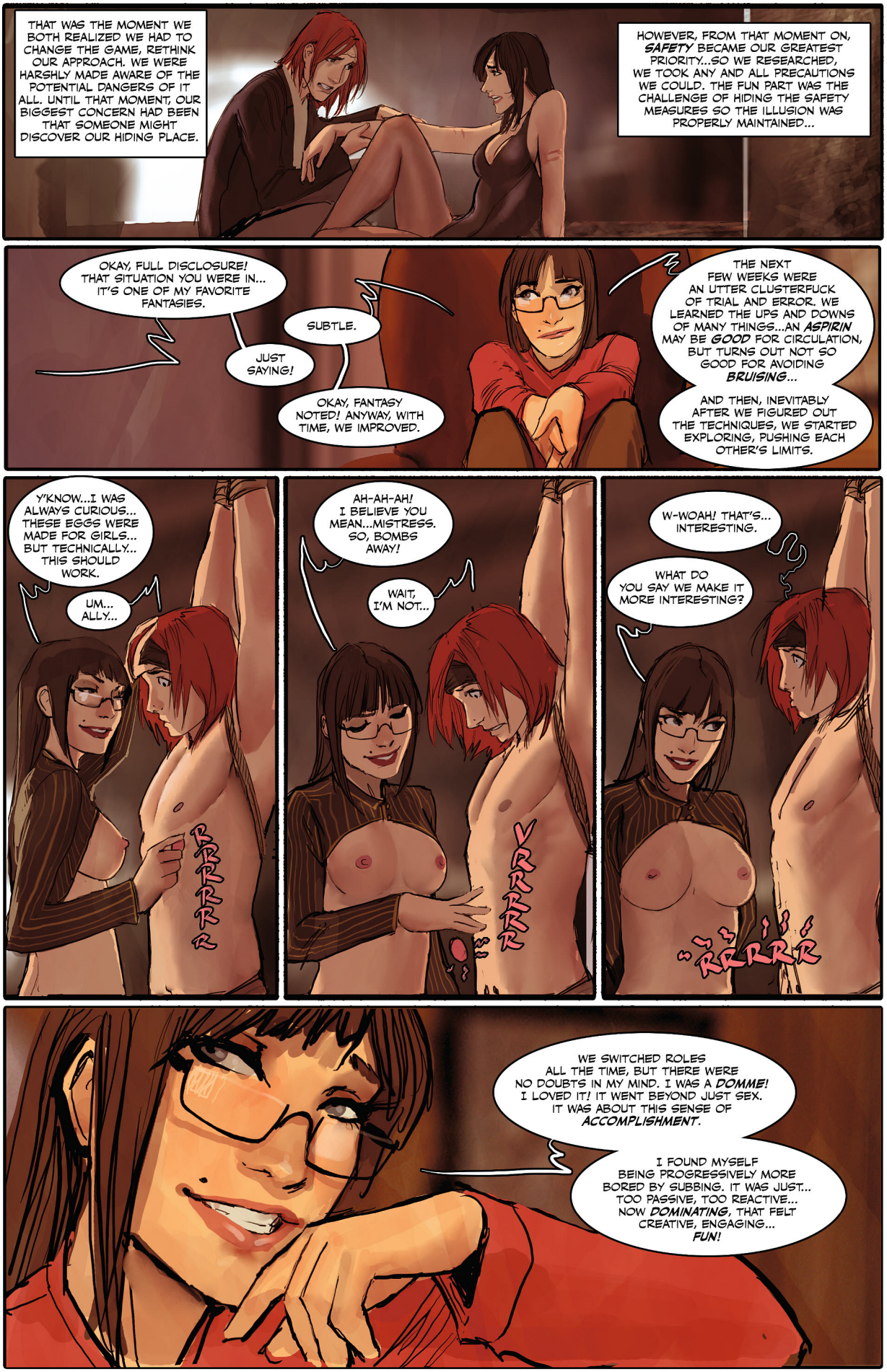

BUT IN THE END, THE CLEANING WAS FOR THE MOST PART DONE, AND THE FUN TIMES HAD BEGAN. AT FIRST WE WERE PRETTY RECKLESS, NEITHER ONE OF US WAS A TRULY COMPETENT DOM. OUR PREDICAMENT PLANNING WAS FLAWED, FULL OF HOLES, BUT WE DIDN'T CARE. WELL, THAT IS 'TIL THE DAY OF THE BAD BURRITO...

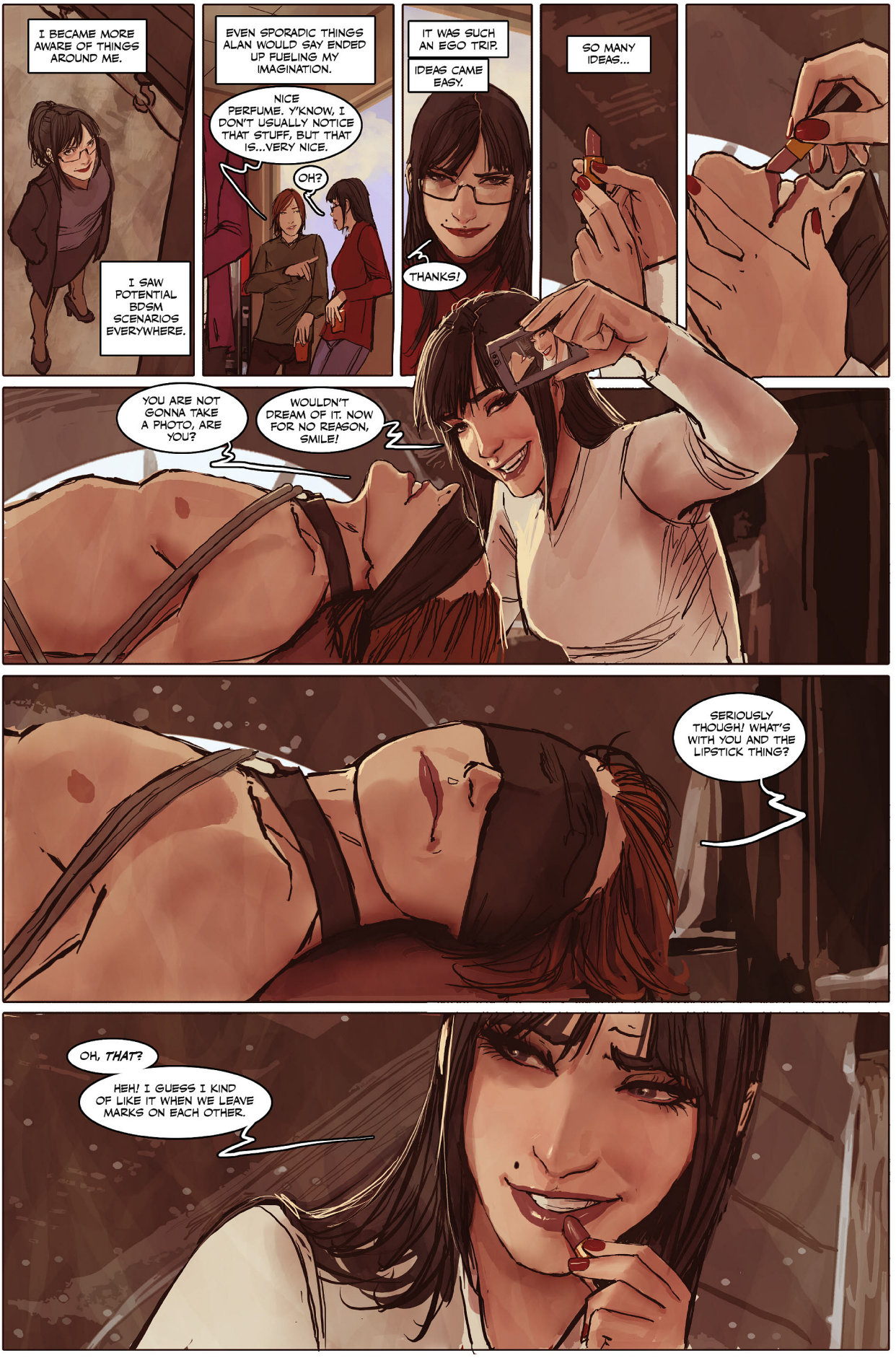
THAT DAY IT WAS MY TURN TO PLAY THE SUB, AND ALAN TRIED OUT A NEW ROPE RIG ON ME. BUT, WELL, APPARENTLY EARLIER THAT DAY HE HAD A BURRITO THAT DECIDED TO KICK HIS ASS.
IT WAS A COMPLICATED RIG FOR US AT THE TIME, SO WE DECIDED NOT TO BREAK THE GAME BY UNDOING IT. ALAN WAS SUPPOSED TO COME RIGHT BACK, BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, WHEN HE RETURNED HE FOUND THE JANITOR BUSY REPLACING A FUSE BOX.


IT WAS A CASE OF INEXPERIENCED IDIOTS MEETING HORRIBLE TIMING. I WAS UP IN THAT ATTIC BOUND AND GAGGED AND UTTERLY HELPLESS. AS TIME PASSED, IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT SOMETHING WENT WRONG. DURING THOSE KINDS OF MOMENTS, YOU QUICKLY REALIZE THAT YOUR MIND IS AN EVIL THING THAT WILL TORMENT YOU RELENTLESSLY.
ALL SORTS OF HORRIBLE SCENARIOS START FLASHING BEFORE YOUR EYES, AND IN THAT SITUATION, THEY ALL SEEM PLAUSIBLE...

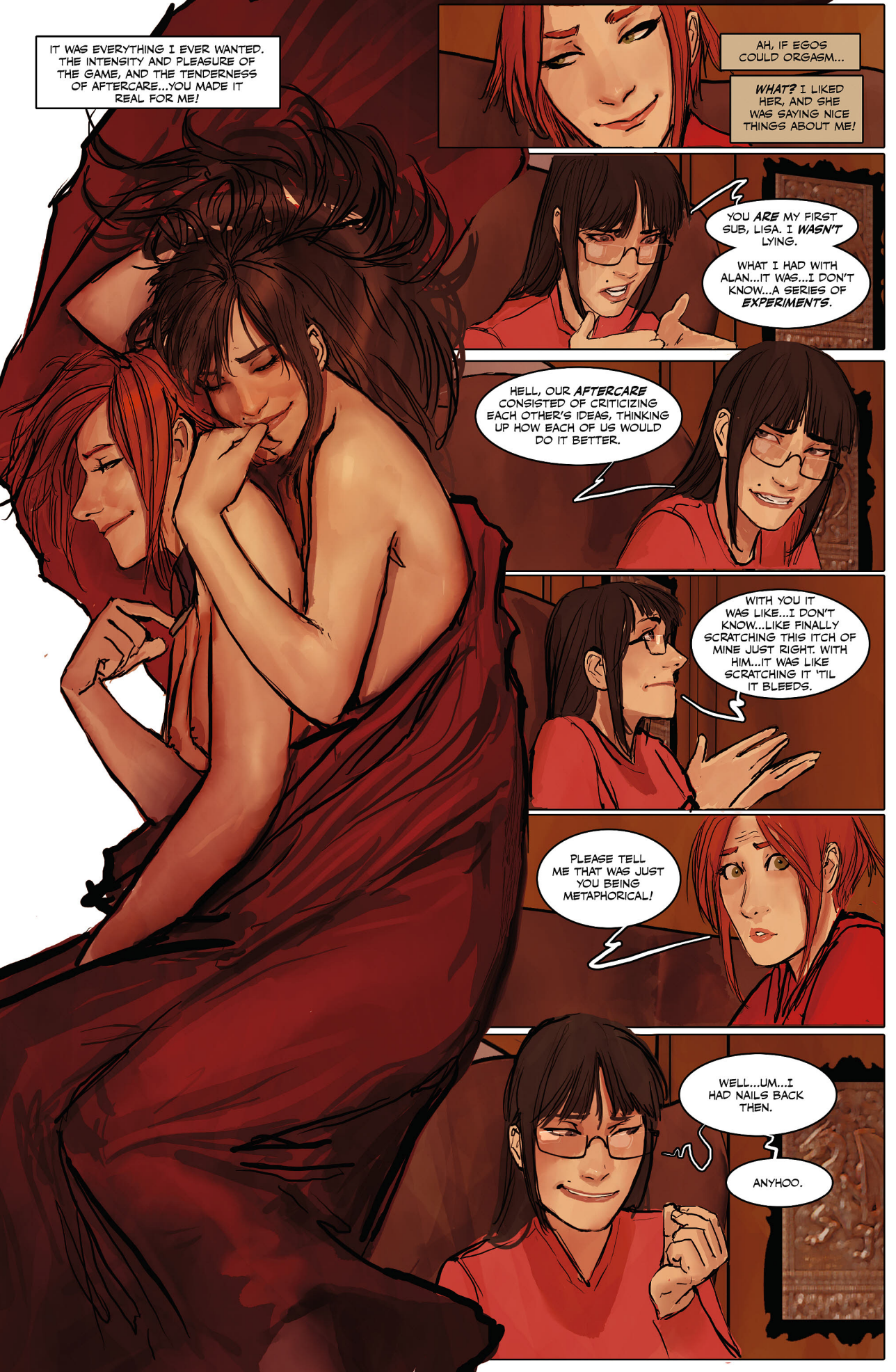
IT TOOK THE JANITOR ABOUT FORTY MINUTES TO SWITCH THE FUSEBOX, AND DURING THAT TIME, ALAN TOO WAS LOSING HIS MIND. HIS ROPEWORK WAS WELL DONE. AT NO POINT WAS IT OUTRIGHT CUTTING OFF MY CIRCULATION, AND WITH SOME SQUIRMING, PRESSURE COULD BE SWITCHED AND RELIEVED. BUT, HE DIDN'T KNOW THAT.

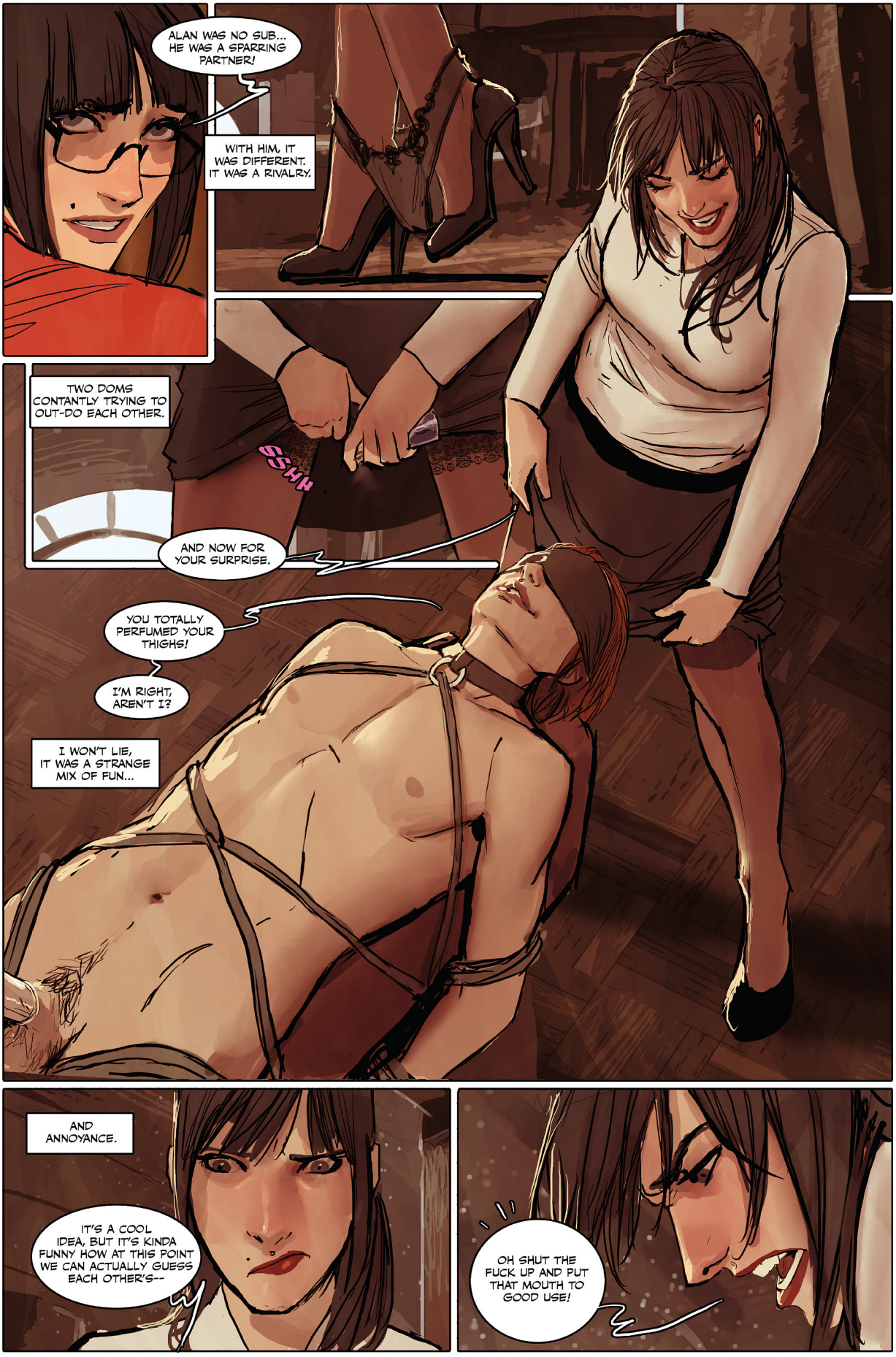
AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. IT WAS A SMALL EVENT, BUT IT WAS A WAKE UP CALL FOR BOTH OF US. IT MADE US AWARE OF JUST HOW WRONG THINGS COULD GO.


THAT WAS THE MOMENT WE BOTH REALIZED WE HAD TO CHANGE THE GAME, RETHINK OUR APPROACH. WE WERE HARSHLY MADE AWARE OF THE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF IT ALL. UNTIL THAT MOMENT, OUR BIGGEST CONCERN HAD BEEN THAT SOMEONE MIGHT DISCOVER OUR HIDING PLACE.
HOWEVER, FROM THAT MOMENT ON, SAFETY BECAME OUR GREATEST PRIORITY...SO WE RESEARCHED, WE TOOK ANY AND ALL PRECAUTIONS WE COULD. THE FUN PART WAS THE CHALLENGE OF HIDING THE SAFETY MEASURES SO THE ILLUSION WAS PROPERLY MAINTAINED...
OKAY, FULL DISCLOSURE! THAT SITUATION YOU WERE IN... IT'S ONE OF MY FAVORITE FANTASIES.
SUBTLE.
JUST SAYING!
OKAY, FANTASY NOTED! ANYWAY, WITH TIME, WE IMPROVED.
THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WERE AN UTTER CLUSTERFUCK OF TRIAL AND ERROR. WE LEARNED THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MANY THINGS...AN ASPIRIN MAY BE GOOD FOR CIRCULATION, BUT TURNS OUT NOT SO GOOD FOR AVOIDING BRUISING...
AND THEN, INEVITABLY AFTER WE FIGURED OUT THE TECHNIQUES, WE STARTED EXPLORING, PUSHING EACH OTHER'S LIMITS.
Y'KNOW...I WAS ALWAYS CURIOUS... THESE EGGS WERE MADE FOR GIRLS... BUT TECHNICALLY... THIS SHOULD WORK.
UM... ALLY...
RRRRRR
AH-AH-AH! I BELIEVE YOU MEAN...MISTRESS. SO, BOMBS AWAY!
WAIT, I'M NOT...
VRRRR
W-WOAH! THAT'S... INTERESTING.
WHAT DO YOU SAY WE MAKE IT MORE INTERESTING?
RRRRR
WE SWITCHED ROLES ALL THE TIME, BUT THERE WERE NO DOUBTS IN MY MIND. I WAS A DOMME! I LOVED IT! IT WENT BEYOND JUST SEX. IT WAS ABOUT THIS SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT.
I FOUND MYSELF BEING PROGRESSIVELY MORE BORED BY SUBBING. IT WAS JUST... TOO PASSIVE, TOO REACTIVE... NOW DOMINATING, THAT FELT CREATIVE, ENGAGING... FUN!

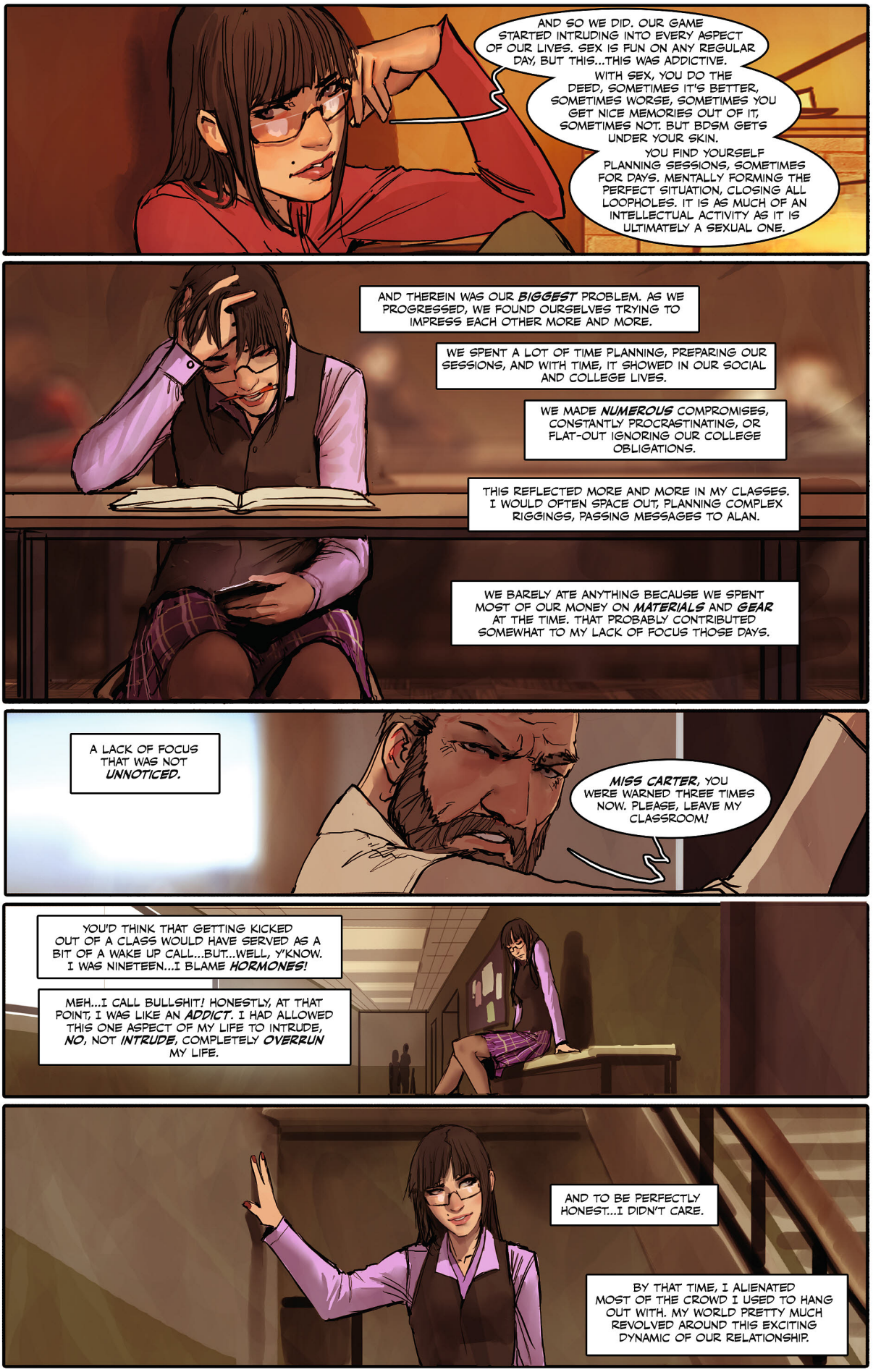

I BECAME MORE AWARE OF THINGS AROUND ME.
I SAW POTENTIAL BDSM SCENARIOS EVERYWHERE.
EVEN SPORADIC THINGS ALAN WOULD SAY ENDED UP FUELING MY IMAGINATION.
NICE PERFUME. Y'KNOW, I DON'T USUALLY NOTICE THAT STUFF, BUT THAT IS...VERY NICE.
OH?
IT WAS SUCH AN EGO TRIP.
IDEAS CAME EASY.
THANKS!
SO MANY IDEAS...
YOU ARE NOT GONNA TAKE A PHOTO, ARE YOU?
WOULDN'T DREAM OF IT. NOW FOR NO REASON, SMILE!
SERIOUSLY THOUGH! WHAT'S WITH YOU AND THE LIPSTICK THING?
OH, *THAT*?
HEH! I GUESS I KIND OF LIKE IT WHEN WE LEAVE MARKS ON EACH OTHER.

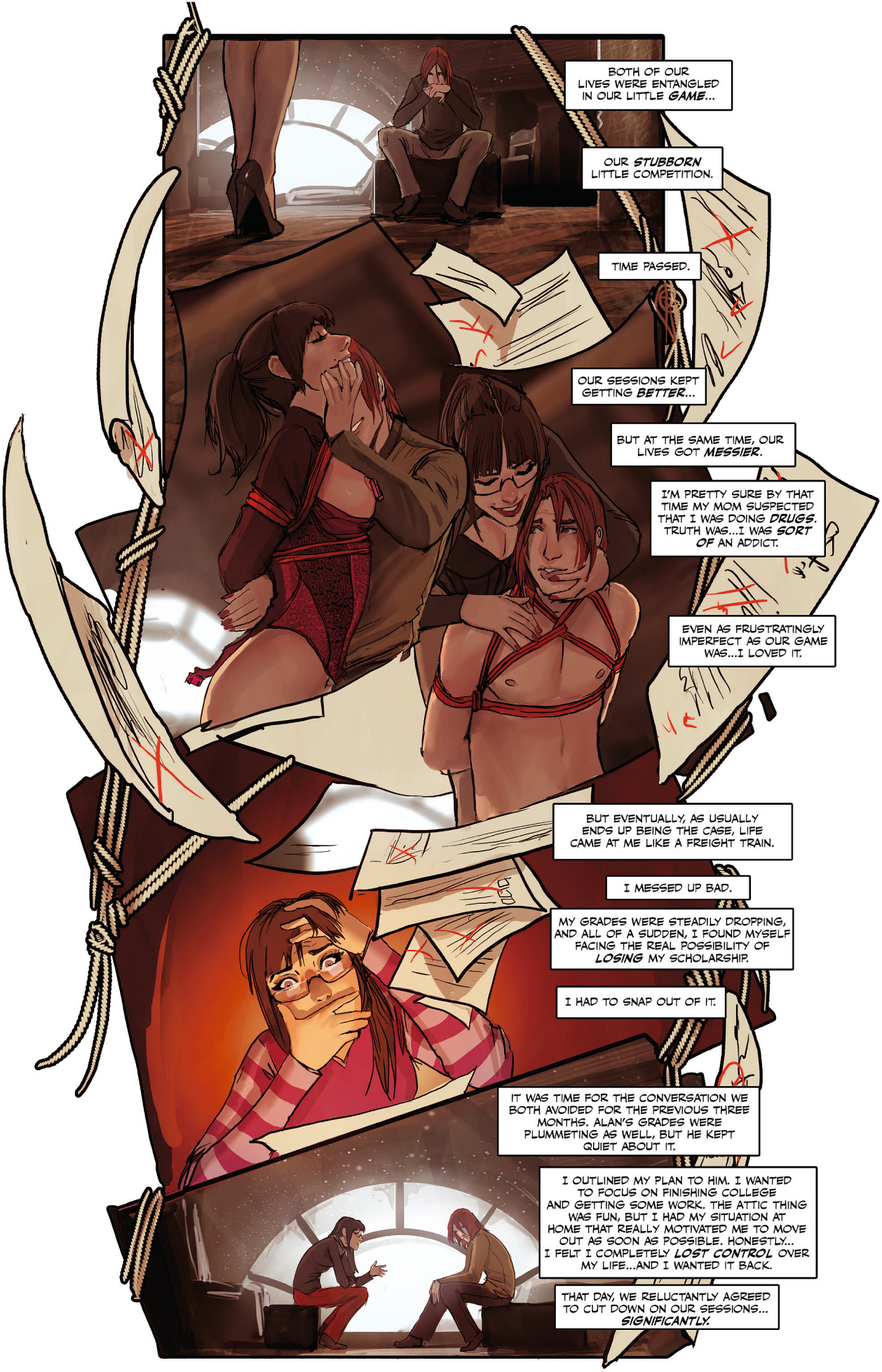
HEY, YOU DID THE SAME THING WITH ME!
I...MAY HAVE...HEH. OLD HABITS DIE HARD.
OLD HABITS, HUH?
ALLY, I DON'T REALLY MIND AT THIS POINT, BUT YOU WEREN'T COMPLETELY HONEST, WERE YOU?
WUH- WHAT?
WHEN?
ABOUT WHAT?
ME BEING YOUR FIRST SUBMISSIVE.
NO! I MEANT THAT!
SHIT! HOW DO I EXPLAIN THIS BEST?
OKAY. SO, LAST WEEK...
SIGH.
DAMN IT, LISA! DO I HAVE TO?
I'M ALL EARS!
FINE!
OUR FIRST TIME WAS THE MOST INTENSE SEXUAL EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE...
NO! IT'S MORE THAN THAT!
SEEING YOUR FACE THAT NIGHT... I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN I EVER FELT HAPPIER.
EGO STROKED
GO ON!

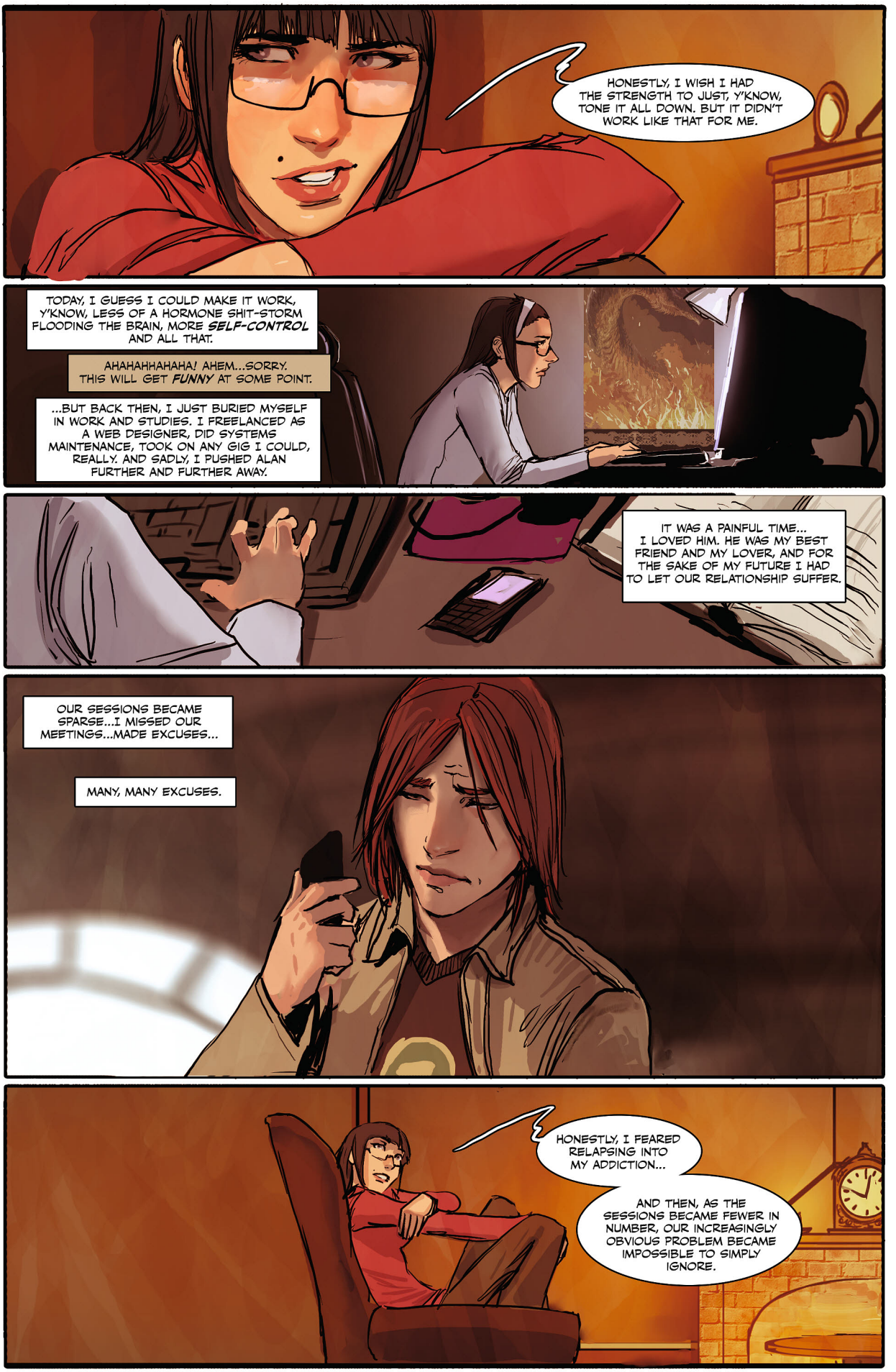

IT WAS EVERYTHING I EVER WANTED. THE INTENSITY AND PLEASURE OF THE GAME, AND THE TENDERNESS OF AFTERCARE...YOU MADE IT REAL FOR ME!
AH, IF EGOS COULD ORGASM...
WHAT? I LIKED HER, AND SHE WAS SAYING NICE THINGS ABOUT ME!
YOU *ARE* MY FIRST SUB, LISA. I *WASN'T* LYING.
WHAT I HAD WITH ALAN...IT WAS...I DON'T KNOW...A SERIES OF *EXPERIMENTS*.
HELL, OUR *AFTERCARE* CONSISTED OF CRITICIZING EACH OTHER'S IDEAS, THINKING UP HOW EACH OF US WOULD DO IT BETTER.
WITH YOU IT WAS LIKE...I DON'T KNOW...LIKE FINALLY SCRATCHING THIS ITCH OF MINE JUST RIGHT. WITH HIM...IT WAS LIKE SCRATCHING IT 'TIL IT BLEEDS.
PLEASE TELL ME THAT WAS JUST YOU BEING METAPHORICAL!
WELL...UM...I HAD NAILS BACK THEN.
ANYHOO.

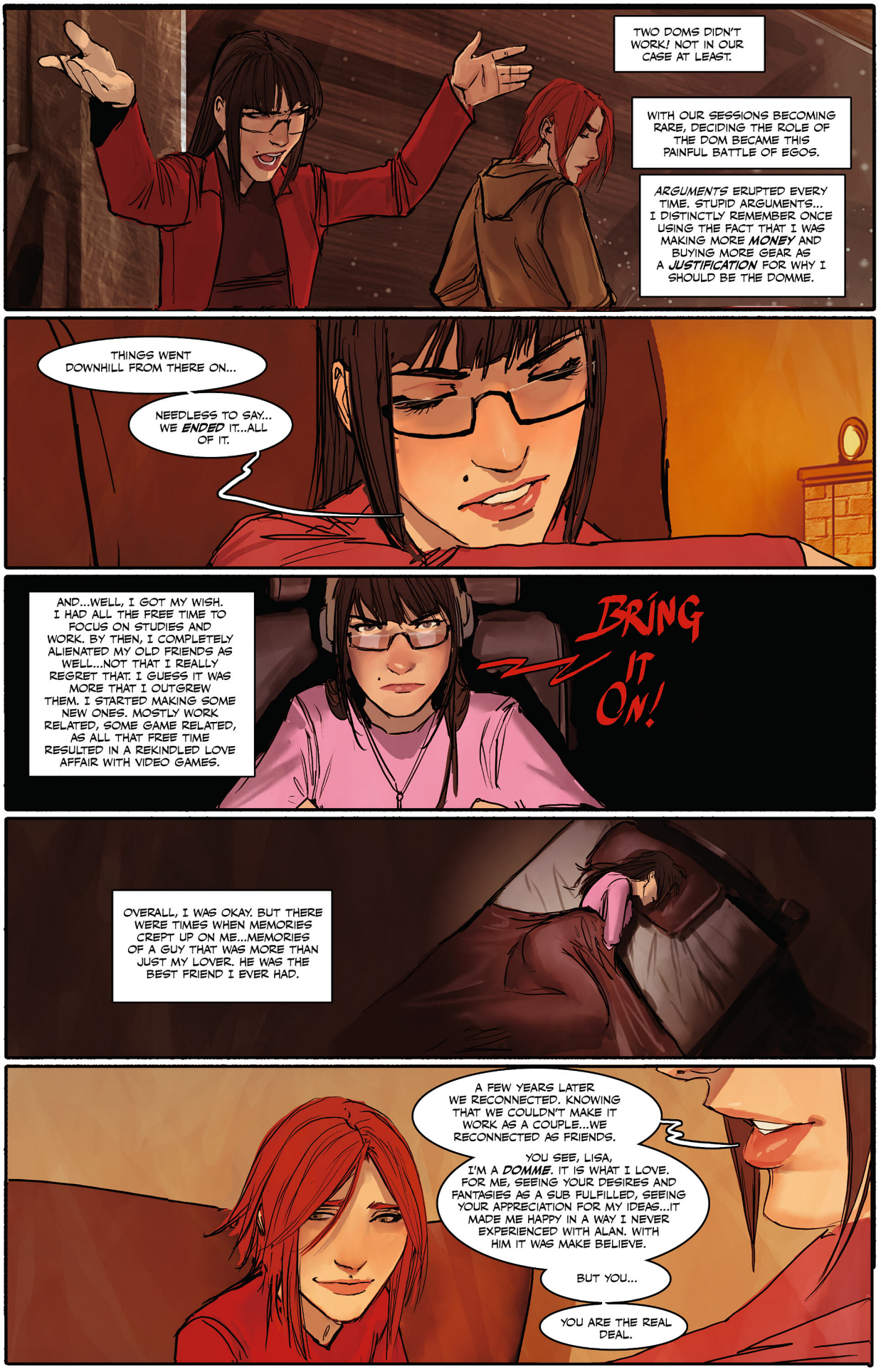

ALAN WAS NO SUB... HE WAS A SPARRING PARTNER!
WITH HIM, IT WAS DIFFERENT. IT WAS A RIVALRY.
TWO DOMS CONTANTLY TRYING TO OUT-DO EACH OTHER.
SSHH
AND NOW FOR YOUR SURPRISE.
YOU TOTALLY PERFUMED YOUR THIGHS!
I'M RIGHT, AREN'T I?
I WON'T LIE, IT WAS A STRANGE MIX OF FUN...
AND ANNOYANCE.
IT'S A COOL IDEA, BUT IT'S KINDA FUNNY HOW AT THIS POINT WE CAN ACTUALLY GUESS EACH OTHER'S--
OH SHUT THE FUCK UP AND PUT THAT MOUTH TO GOOD USE!

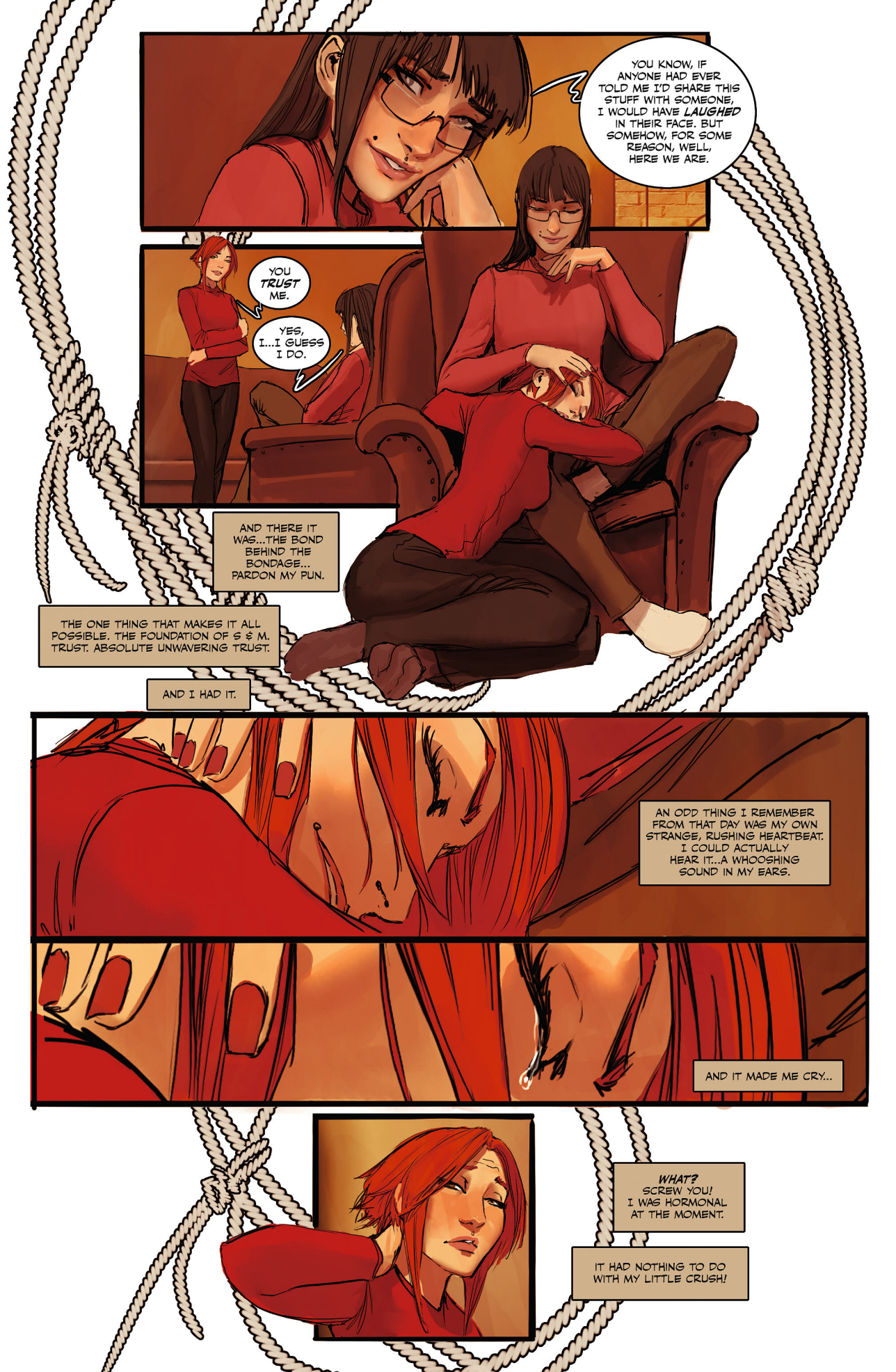
SO, I MEAN, YOU SAY IT WAS FUN... SO WHAT ENDED IT?
EGO. A FUCK-TON OF EGO!
WHERE WAS I?
OH, RIGHT! TWO DOMS!
WHEN YOU AND I WERE DONE WITH OUR FIRST SESSION, YOU HAD THIS GLOW ABOUT YOU, AND I KNEW I DID WELL.
IT WAS AN AMAZING FEELING, DEEP SATISFACTION... FUCK, LISA! I GIGGLED LIKE A MORON THIS ENTIRE WEEK.
ALAN AND I WEREN'T GETTING THAT FEELING FROM EACH OTHER, AND IT WAS MADDENINGLY FRUSTRATING.
AS I SAID...IT WAS AN ITCH THAT WOULDN'T GO AWAY.
NOT FOR THE LACK OF TRYING.
DUMBASSES THAT WE WERE BACK THEN, OUR ANSWER TO THE ITCHY PROBLEM WAS... KEEP SCRATCHING!

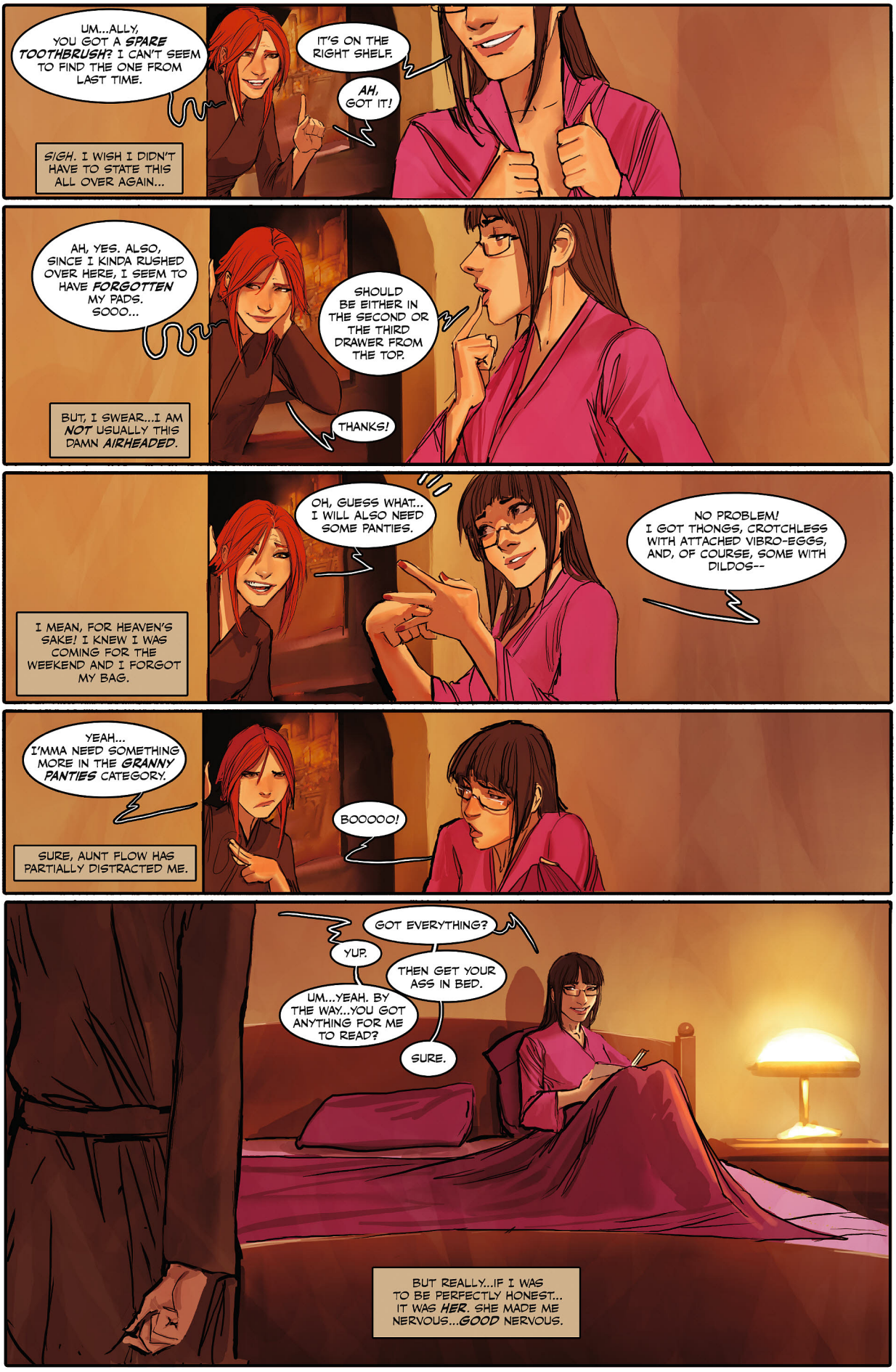

AND SO WE DID. OUR GAME STARTED INTRUDING INTO EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES. SEX IS FUN ON ANY REGULAR DAY, BUT THIS...THIS WAS ADDICTIVE.
WITH SEX, YOU DO THE DEED, SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER, SOMETIMES WORSE, SOMETIMES YOU GET NICE MEMORIES OUT OF IT, SOMETIMES NOT. BUT BDSM GETS UNDER YOUR SKIN.
YOU FIND YOURSELF PLANNING SESSIONS, SOMETIMES FOR DAYS. MENTALLY FORMING THE PERFECT SITUATION, CLOSING ALL LOOPHOLES. IT IS AS MUCH OF AN INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY AS IT IS ULTIMATELY A SEXUAL ONE.
AND THEREIN WAS OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM. AS WE PROGRESSED, WE FOUND OURSELVES TRYING TO IMPRESS EACH OTHER MORE AND MORE.
WE SPENT A LOT OF TIME PLANNING, PREPARING OUR SESSIONS, AND WITH TIME, IT SHOWED IN OUR SOCIAL AND COLLEGE LIVES.
WE MADE NUMEROUS COMPROMISES, CONSTANTLY PROCRASTINATING, OR FLAT-OUT IGNORING OUR COLLEGE OBLIGATIONS.
THIS REFLECTED MORE AND MORE IN MY CLASSES. I WOULD OFTEN SPACE OUT, PLANNING COMPLEX RIGGINGS, PASSING MESSAGES TO ALAN.
WE BARELY ATE ANYTHING BECAUSE WE SPENT MOST OF OUR MONEY ON MATERIALS AND GEAR AT THE TIME. THAT PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED SOMEWHAT TO MY LACK OF FOCUS THOSE DAYS.
A LACK OF FOCUS THAT WAS NOT UNNOTICED.
MISS CARTER, YOU WERE WARNED THREE TIMES NOW. PLEASE, LEAVE MY CLASSROOM!
YOU'D THINK THAT GETTING KICKED OUT OF A CLASS WOULD HAVE SERVED AS A BIT OF A WAKE UP CALL...BUT...WELL, Y'KNOW. I WAS NINETEEN...I BLAME HORMONES!
MEH...I CALL BULLSHIT! HONESTLY, AT THAT POINT, I WAS LIKE AN ADDICT. I HAD ALLOWED THIS ONE ASPECT OF MY LIFE TO INTRUDE, NO, NOT INTRUDE, COMPLETELY OVERRUN MY LIFE.
AND TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST...I DIDN'T CARE.
BY THAT TIME, I ALIENATED MOST OF THE CROWD I USED TO HANG OUT WITH. MY WORLD PRETTY MUCH REVOLVED AROUND THIS EXCITING DYNAMIC OF OUR RELATIONSHIP.

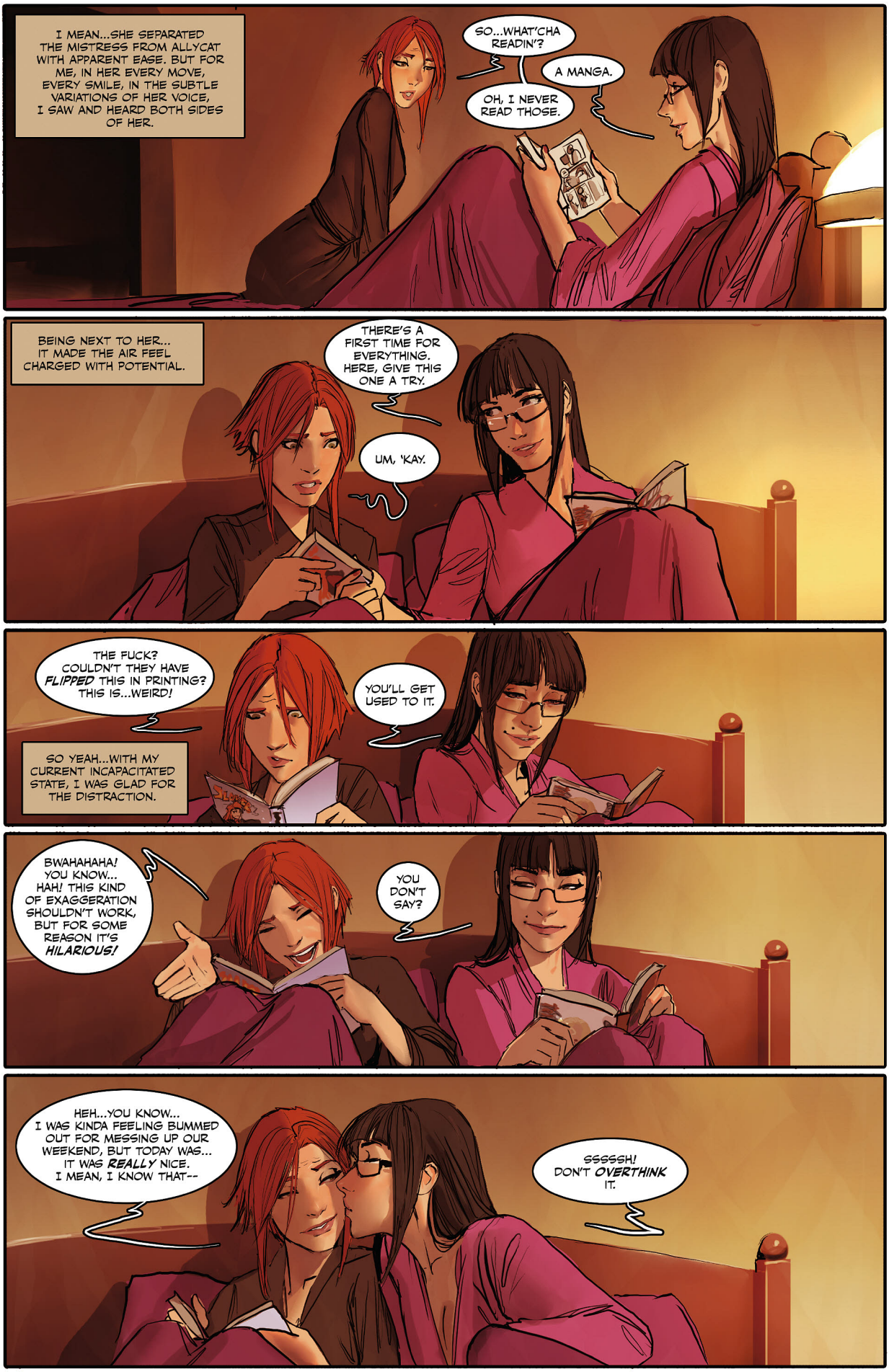

BOTH OF OUR LIVES WERE ENTANGLED IN OUR LITTLE GAME...
OUR STUBBORN LITTLE COMPETITION.
TIME PASSED.
OUR SESSIONS KEPT GETTING BETTER...
BUT AT THE SAME TIME, OUR LIVES GOT MESSIER.
I'M PRETTY SURE BY THAT TIME MY MOM SUSPECTED THAT I WAS DOING DRUGS. TRUTH WAS...I WAS SORT OF AN ADDICT.
EVEN AS FRUSTRATINGLY IMPERFECT AS OUR GAME WAS...I LOVED IT.
BUT EVENTUALLY, AS USUALLY ENDS UP BEING THE CASE, LIFE CAME AT ME LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN.
I MESSED UP BAD.
MY GRADES WERE STEADILY DROPPING, AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, I FOUND MYSELF FACING THE REAL POSSIBILITY OF LOSING MY SCHOLARSHIP.
I HAD TO SNAP OUT OF IT.
IT WAS TIME FOR THE CONVERSATION WE BOTH AVOIDED FOR THE PREVIOUS THREE MONTHS. ALAN'S GRADES WERE PLUMMETING AS WELL, BUT HE KEPT QUIET ABOUT IT.
I OUTLINED MY PLAN TO HIM. I WANTED TO FOCUS ON FINISHING COLLEGE AND GETTING SOME WORK. THE ATTIC THING WAS FUN, BUT I HAD MY SITUATION AT HOME THAT REALLY MOTIVATED ME TO MOVE OUT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HONESTLY... I FELT I COMPLETELY LOST CONTROL OVER MY LIFE...AND I WANTED IT BACK.
THAT DAY, WE RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO CUT DOWN ON OUR SESSIONS... SIGNIFICANTLY.

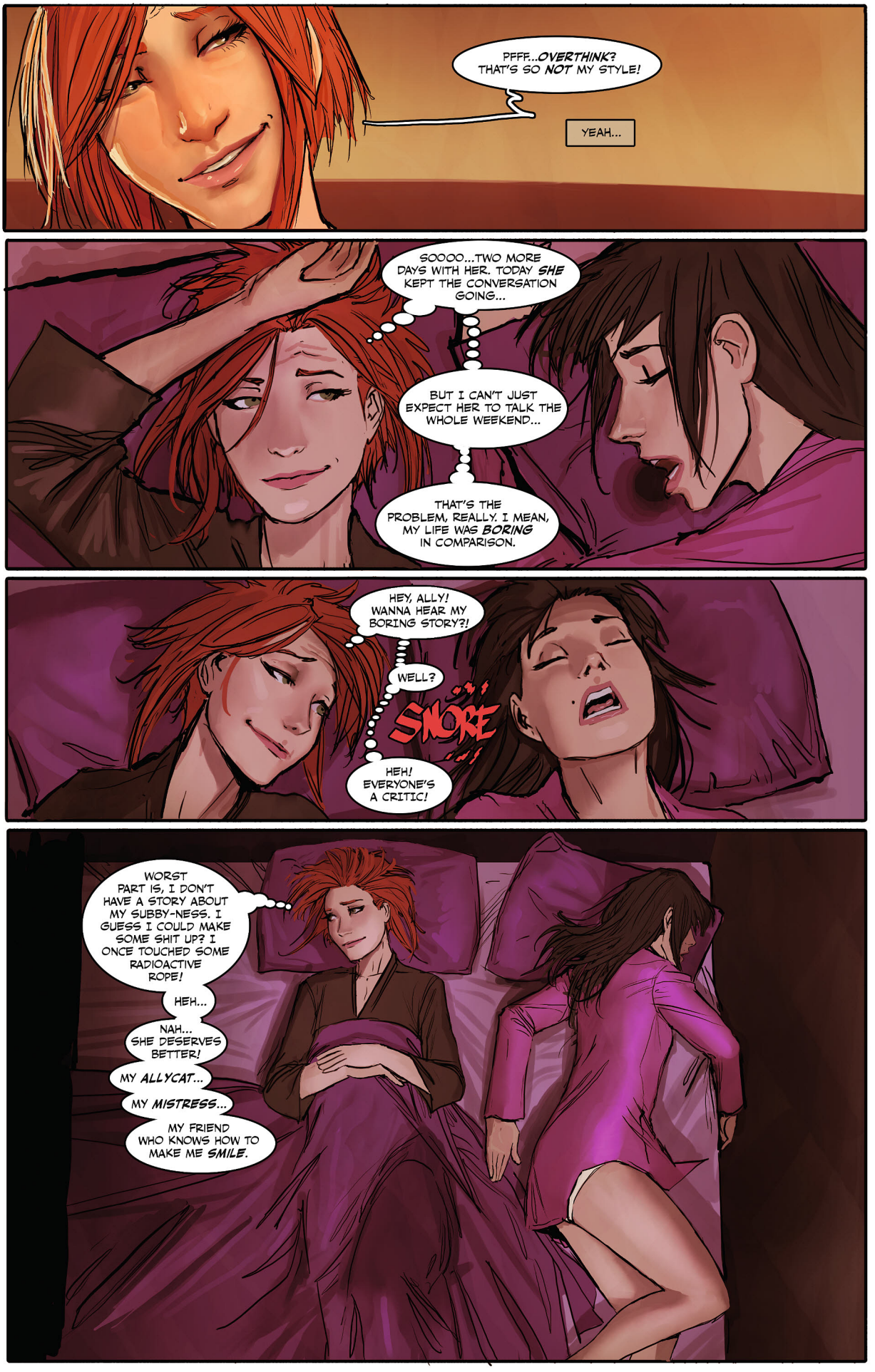

HONESTLY, I WISH I HAD THE STRENGTH TO JUST, Y'KNOW, TONE IT ALL DOWN. BUT IT DIDN'T WORK LIKE THAT FOR ME.
TODAY, I GUESS I COULD MAKE IT WORK, Y'KNOW, LESS OF A HORMONE SHIT-STORM FLOODING THE BRAIN, MORE SELF-CONTROL AND ALL THAT.
AHAHAHHAHAHA! AHEM...SORRY. THIS WILL GET FUNNY AT SOME POINT.
...BUT BACK THEN, I JUST BURIED MYSELF IN WORK AND STUDIES. I FREELANCED AS A WEB DESIGNER, DID SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE, TOOK ON ANY GIG I COULD, REALLY. AND SADLY, I PUSHED ALAN FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY.
IT WAS A PAINFUL TIME... I LOVED HIM. HE WAS MY BEST FRIEND AND MY LOVER, AND FOR THE SAKE OF MY FUTURE I HAD TO LET OUR RELATIONSHIP SUFFER.
OUR SESSIONS BECAME SPARSE...I MISSED OUR MEETINGS...MADE EXCUSES...
MANY, MANY EXCUSES.
HONESTLY, I FEARED RELAPSING INTO MY ADDICTION...
AND THEN, AS THE SESSIONS BECAME FEWER IN NUMBER, OUR INCREASINGLY OBVIOUS PROBLEM BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO SIMPLY IGNORE.

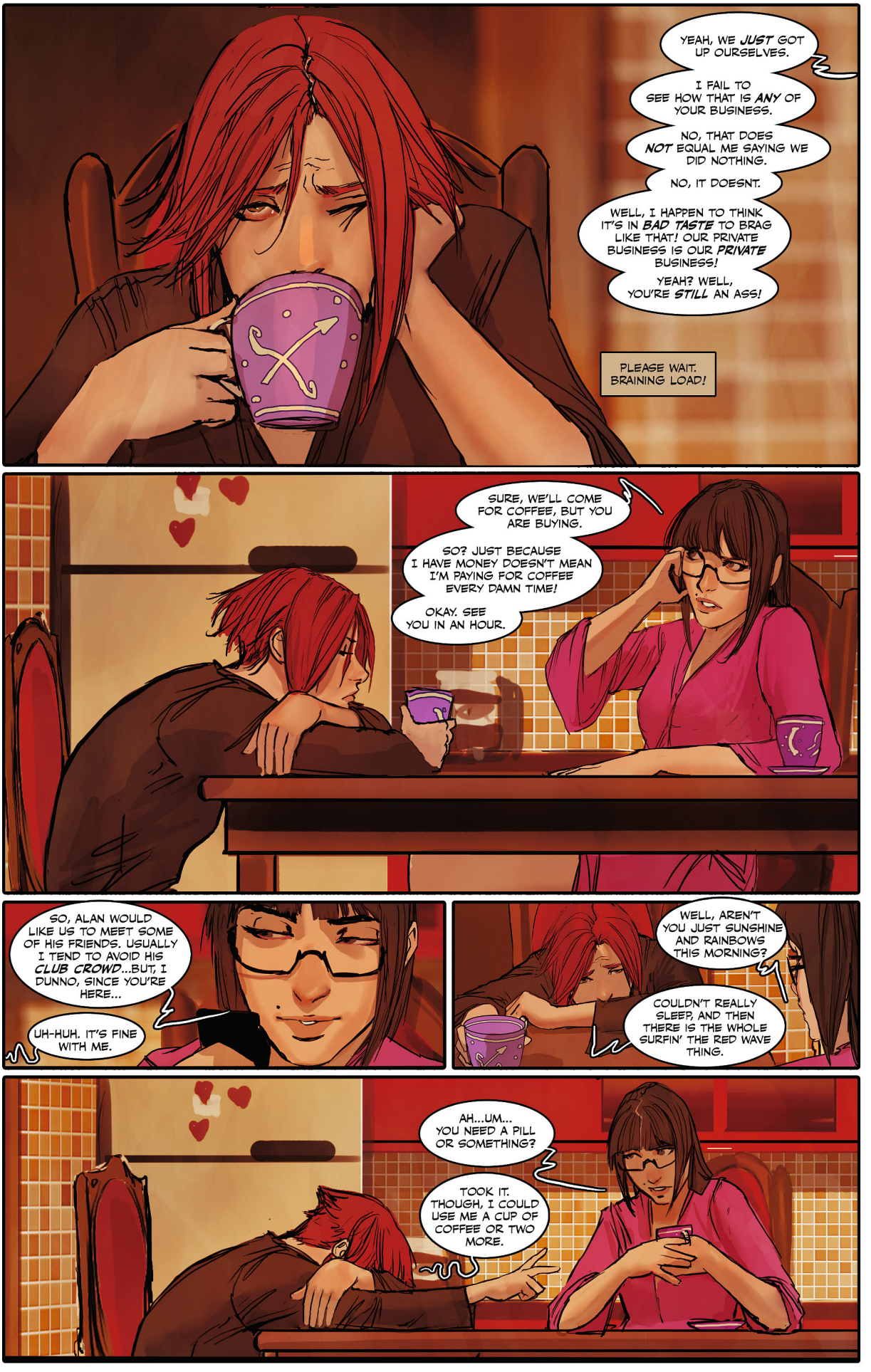

TWO DOMS DIDN'T WORK! NOT IN OUR CASE AT LEAST.
WITH OUR SESSIONS BECOMING RARE, DECIDING THE ROLE OF THE DOM BECAME THIS PAINFUL BATTLE OF EGOS.
ARGUMENTS ERUPTED EVERY TIME. STUPID ARGUMENTS... I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER ONCE USING THE FACT THAT I WAS MAKING MORE ***MONEY*** AND BUYING MORE GEAR AS A ***JUSTIFICATION*** FOR WHY I SHOULD BE THE DOMME.
THINGS WENT DOWNHILL FROM THERE ON...
NEEDLESS TO SAY... WE ***ENDED*** IT...ALL OF IT.
AND...WELL, I GOT MY WISH. I HAD ALL THE FREE TIME TO FOCUS ON STUDIES AND WORK. BY THEN, I COMPLETELY ALIENATED MY OLD FRIENDS AS WELL...NOT THAT I REALLY REGRET THAT. I GUESS IT WAS MORE THAT I OUTGREW THEM. I STARTED MAKING SOME NEW ONES. MOSTLY WORK RELATED, SOME GAME RELATED, AS ALL THAT FREE TIME RESULTED IN A REKINDLED LOVE AFFAIR WITH VIDEO GAMES.
BRING IT ON!
OVERALL, I WAS OKAY. BUT THERE WERE TIMES WHEN MEMORIES CREPT UP ON ME...MEMORIES OF A GUY THAT WAS MORE THAN JUST MY LOVER. HE WAS THE BEST FRIEND I EVER HAD.
A FEW YEARS LATER WE RECONNECTED. KNOWING THAT WE COULDN'T MAKE IT WORK AS A COUPLE...WE RECONNECTED AS FRIENDS.
YOU SEE, LISA, I'M A ***DOMME***. IT IS WHAT I LOVE. FOR ME, SEEING YOUR DESIRES AND FANTASIES AS A SUB FULFILLED, SEEING YOUR APPRECIATION FOR MY IDEAS...IT MADE ME HAPPY IN A WAY I NEVER EXPERIENCED WITH ALAN. WITH HIM IT WAS MAKE BELIEVE.
BUT YOU...
YOU ARE THE REAL DEAL.


YOU KNOW, IF ANYONE HAD EVER TOLD ME I'D SHARE THIS STUFF WITH SOMEONE, I WOULD HAVE LAUGHED IN THEIR FACE. BUT SOMEHOW, FOR SOME REASON, WELL, HERE WE ARE.
YOU TRUST ME.
YES, I...I GUESS I DO.
AND THERE IT WAS...THE BOND BEHIND THE BONDAGE... PARDON MY PUN.
THE ONE THING THAT MAKES IT ALL POSSIBLE. THE FOUNDATION OF S & M. TRUST. ABSOLUTE UNWAVERING TRUST.
AND I HAD IT.
AN ODD THING I REMEMBER FROM THAT DAY WAS MY OWN STRANGE, RUSHING HEARTBEAT. I COULD ACTUALLY HEAR IT...A WHOOSHING SOUND IN MY EARS.
AND IT MADE ME CRY...
WHAT? SCREW YOU! I WAS HORMONAL AT THE MOMENT.
IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH MY LITTLE CRUSH!


UM...ALLY, YOU GOT A SPARE TOOTHBRUSH? I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND THE ONE FROM LAST TIME.
IT'S ON THE RIGHT SHELF.
AH, GOT IT!
SIGH. I WISH I DIDN'T HAVE TO STATE THIS ALL OVER AGAIN...
AH, YES. ALSO, SINCE I KINDA RUSHED OVER HERE, I SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN MY PADS. SOOO...
SHOULD BE EITHER IN THE SECOND OR THE THIRD DRAWER FROM THE TOP.
THANKS!
BUT, I SWEAR...I AM NOT USUALLY THIS DAMN AIRHEADED.
OH, GUESS WHAT... I WILL ALSO NEED SOME PANTIES.
NO PROBLEM! I GOT THONGS, CROTCHLESS WITH ATTACHED VIBRO-EGGS, AND, OF COURSE, SOME WITH DILDOS--
I MEAN, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE! I KNEW I WAS COMING FOR THE WEEKEND AND I FORGOT MY BAG.
YEAH... I'MMA NEED SOMETHING MORE IN THE GRANNY PANTIES CATEGORY.
BOOOOO!
SURE, AUNT FLOW HAS PARTIALLY DISTRACTED ME.
GOT EVERYTHING?
YUP.
THEN GET YOUR ASS IN BED.
UM...YEAH. BY THE WAY...YOU GOT ANYTHING FOR ME TO READ?
SURE.
BUT REALLY...IF I WAS TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST... IT WAS HER. SHE MADE ME NERVOUS...GOOD NERVOUS.


I MEAN...SHE SEPARATED THE MISTRESS FROM ALLYCAT WITH APPARENT EASE. BUT FOR ME, IN HER EVERY MOVE, EVERY SMILE, IN THE SUBTLE VARIATIONS OF HER VOICE, I SAW AND HEARD BOTH SIDES OF HER.
SO...WHAT'CHA READIN'?
A MANGA.
OH, I NEVER READ THOSE.
BEING NEXT TO HER... IT MADE THE AIR FEEL CHARGED WITH POTENTIAL.
THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING. HERE, GIVE THIS ONE A TRY.
UM, 'KAY.
THE FUCK? COULDN'T THEY HAVE *FLIPPED* THIS IN PRINTING? THIS IS...WEIRD!
YOU'LL GET USED TO IT.
SO YEAH...WITH MY CURRENT INCAPACITATED STATE, I WAS GLAD FOR THE DISTRACTION.
BWAHAHAHA! YOU KNOW... HAH! THIS KIND OF EXAGGERATION SHOULDN'T WORK, BUT FOR SOME REASON IT'S *HILARIOUS!*
YOU DON'T SAY?
HEH...YOU KNOW... I WAS KINDA FEELING BUMMED OUT FOR MESSING UP OUR WEEKEND, BUT TODAY WAS... IT WAS *REALLY* NICE. I MEAN, I KNOW THAT--
SSSSSH! DON'T *OVERTHINK* IT.

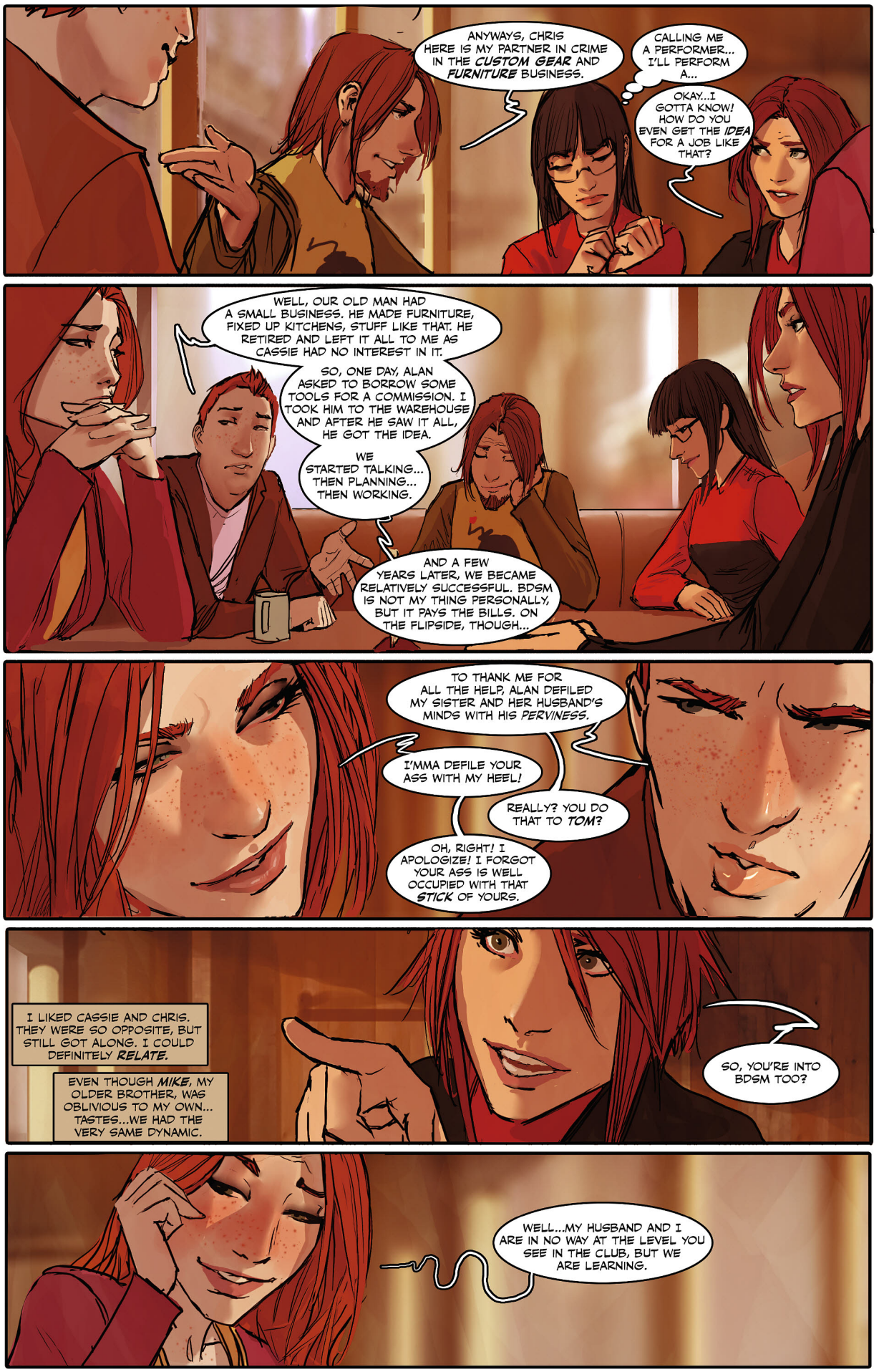

PFFF...OVERTHINK? THAT'S SO NOT MY STYLE!
YEAH...
SOOOO...TWO MORE DAYS WITH HER. TODAY SHE KEPT THE CONVERSATION GOING...
BUT I CAN'T JUST EXPECT HER TO TALK THE WHOLE WEEKEND...
THAT'S THE PROBLEM, REALLY. I MEAN, MY LIFE WAS BORING IN COMPARISON.
HEY, ALLY! WANNA HEAR MY BORING STORY?!
WELL?
SNORE
HEH! EVERYONE'S A CRITIC!
WORST PART IS, I DON'T HAVE A STORY ABOUT MY SUBBY-NESS. I GUESS I COULD MAKE SOME SHIT UP? I ONCE TOUCHED SOME RADIOACTIVE ROPE!
HEH...
NAH... SHE DESERVES BETTER!
MY ALLYCAT...
MY MISTRESS...
MY FRIEND WHO KNOWS HOW TO MAKE ME SMILE.


YEAH, WE JUST GOT UP OURSELVES.
I FAIL TO SEE HOW THAT IS ANY OF YOUR BUSINESS.
NO, THAT DOES NOT EQUAL ME SAYING WE DID NOTHING.
NO, IT DOESNT.
WELL, I HAPPEN TO THINK IT'S IN BAD TASTE TO BRAG LIKE THAT! OUR PRIVATE BUSINESS IS OUR PRIVATE BUSINESS!
YEAH? WELL, YOU'RE STILL AN ASS!
PLEASE WAIT. BRAINING LOAD!
SURE, WE'LL COME FOR COFFEE, BUT YOU ARE BUYING.
SO? JUST BECAUSE I HAVE MONEY DOESN'T MEAN I'M PAYING FOR COFFEE EVERY DAMN TIME!
OKAY. SEE YOU IN AN HOUR.
SO, ALAN WOULD LIKE US TO MEET SOME OF HIS FRIENDS. USUALLY I TEND TO AVOID HIS CLUB CROWD...BUT, I DUNNO, SINCE YOU'RE HERE...
UH-HUH. IT'S FINE WITH ME.
WELL, AREN'T YOU JUST SUNSHINE AND RAINBOWS THIS MORNING?
COULDN'T REALLY SLEEP, AND THEN THERE IS THE WHOLE SURFIN' THE RED WAVE THING.
AH...UM... YOU NEED A PILL OR SOMETHING?
TOOK IT. THOUGH, I COULD USE ME A CUP OF COFFEE OR TWO MORE.

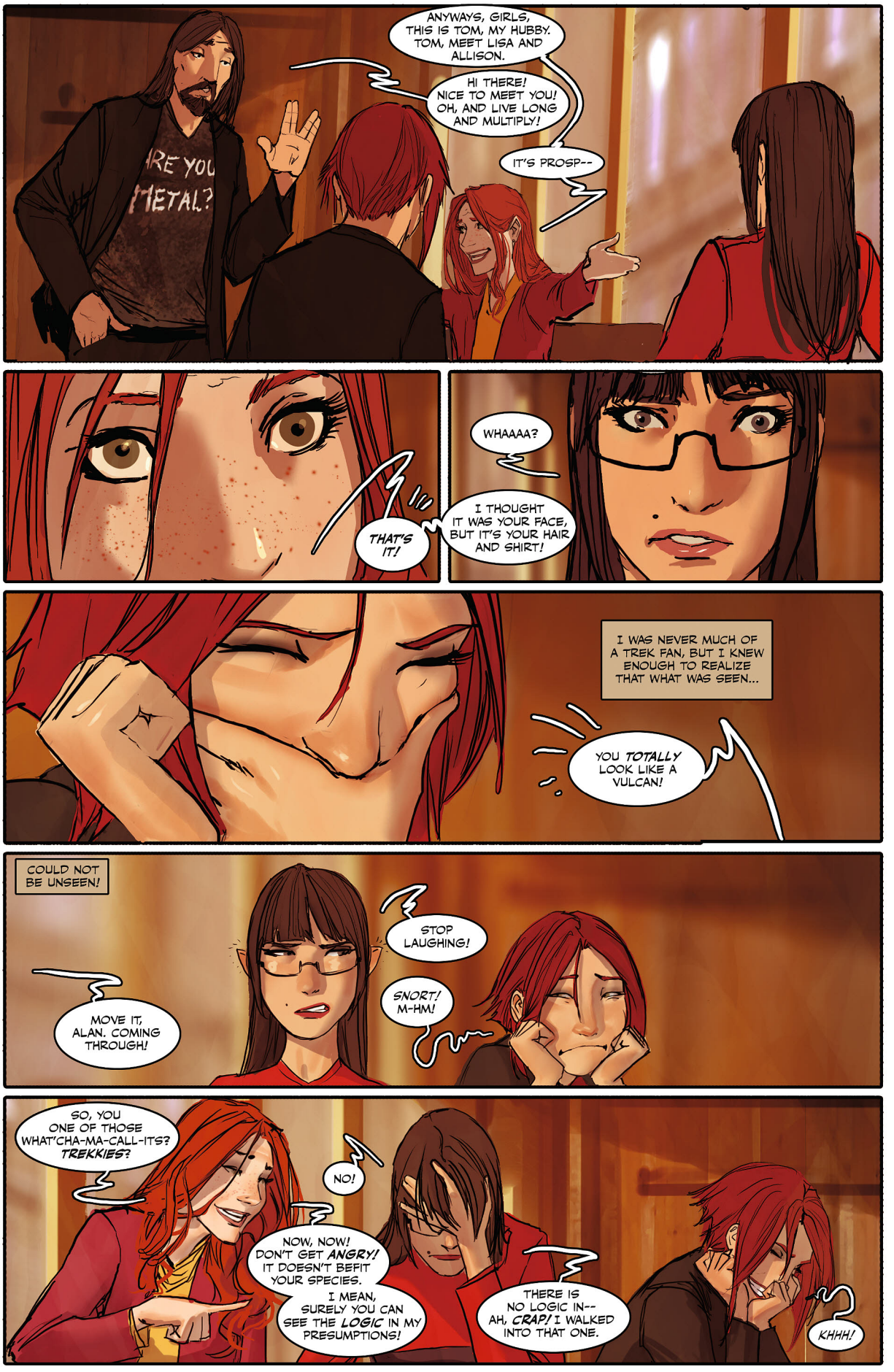
WE ARE GOING TO A COFFEE PLACE, WE CAN HAVE OUR BREAKFAST THERE TOO IF YOU ARE UP FOR IT.
SIGH. YOU MEAN WE GOTTA WALK AROUND? I DONT WANNA!
AW, COME ON. I RARELY LEAVE THE HOUSE MYSELF. AT LEAST WITH YOU I HAVE AN EXCUSE TO DO SO.
MMMMMN, OKAY. SIGH.
SEE, A WONDERFUL MORNING!
I'M NOT IMPRESSED!
YEESH! WHAT KEPT YOU UP ALL NIGHT?
AH, YOU KNOW... BUSY MIND AND LOUD NOISES.
HUH?
NEVERMIND!

OKAY, SERIOUSLY. HOW MUCH SLEEP DID YOU GET?
OH... GOOD FOUR HOURS.
YIKES!
KEEP THE CHANGE!
MMMN... AUTUMN. THE SEASON MADE FOR NAPPING!
OKAY...LET'S GET SOME BLOOD TO THE BRAIN.
KA-CRAK
THE HELL?!
YOU DO KNOW THAT IS BAD FOR YOU.
YEAH, BUT IT SURE HITS THE SPOT.
STILL, YOU COULD INJURE YOUR LIGAMENTS.
PLEASE, I DO THAT ALL THE TIME.
CRACK CRUCK CA-CRACK
CHECK OUT THIS MELODY!
OKAY... THAT'S... UNPLEASANT!
I BEG TO DIFFER!
THERE YOU TWO ARE! TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH!
YEAH, SORRY 'BOUT THAT--THE FUCK?
HAH!
WELL, I CERTAINLY FEEL AT HOME!
CHECK US OUT! THE RED LEGION!
THIS IS... CREEPY.

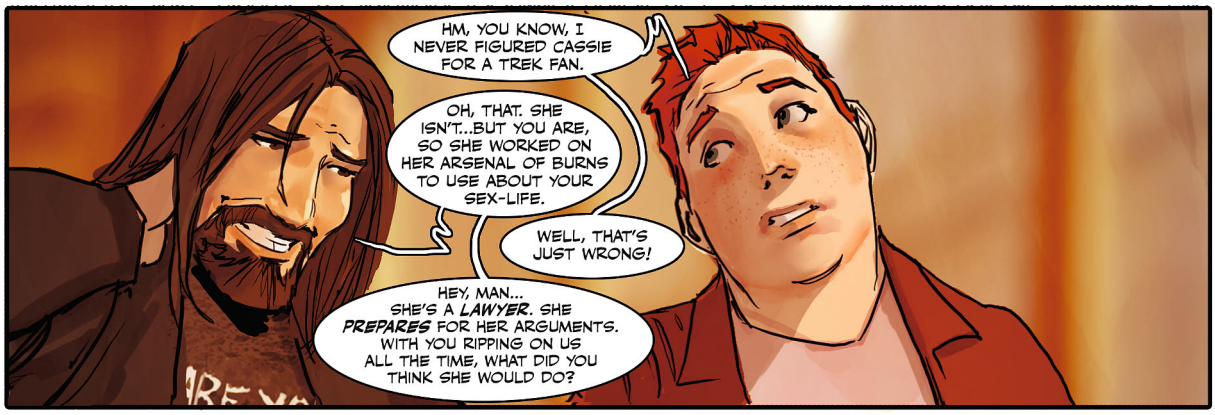
THAT WAS THE DAY WE MET CASSIE, CHRIS, AND TOM... THE DAY OUR LITTLE CROWD STARTED GATHERING.
SO, GIRLS, MEET CHRIS AND CASSANDRA. CHRIS, CASSIE, MEET LISA AND ALLISON.
CHRIS, I KNOW!
HI THERE! NICE TO MEET YOU!
LIKEWISE!
HM. THERE IS SOMETHING SO FAMILIAR ABOUT YOU, ALLISON.
OH, WAIT! ARE YOU ONE OF ALAN'S PERFORMER FRIENDS FROM THE CLUB?
WHA-WHAT?
NO! I HAVEN'T BEEN TO THE CRIMSON IN YEARS.
SO...ALLY DIDN'T LIKE CASSIE ALL THAT MUCH AT FIRST.
SHE SAID CASSIE REMINDED HER OF HER OLDER SISTER.
I'VE MET ALLY'S SISTER SINCE THEN, AND YEAH, THERE IS SOMETHING TO THAT.
OH, DON'T GET ME WRONG, I'M NOT JUDGING OR ANYTHING. HELL, GIVEN THE FACT THAT I FREQUENTLY VISIT THE PLACE, THAT WOULD MAKE ME AN EPIC HYPOCRITE.
IT'S JUST THAT MANY OF THE PERFORMERS THERE ARE MASKED AND, I DON'T KNOW, THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT YOU. I CAN'T PUT MY FINGER ON IT, BUT YOU'RE SO FAMILIAR.

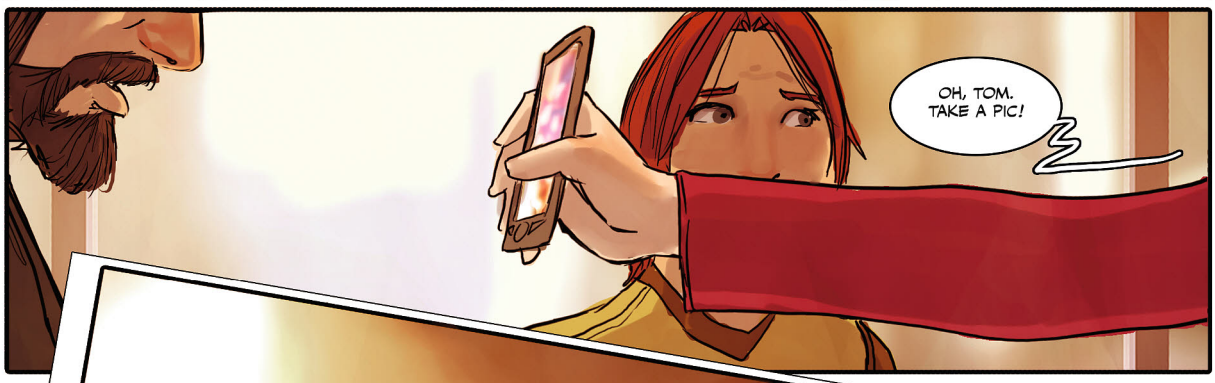

ANYWAYS, CHRIS HERE IS MY PARTNER IN CRIME IN THE CUSTOM GEAR AND FURNITURE BUSINESS.
CALLING ME A PERFORMER... I'LL PERFORM A...
OKAY...I GOTTA KNOW! HOW DO YOU EVEN GET THE IDEA FOR A JOB LIKE THAT?
WELL, OUR OLD MAN HAD A SMALL BUSINESS. HE MADE FURNITURE, FIXED UP KITCHENS, STUFF LIKE THAT. HE RETIRED AND LEFT IT ALL TO ME AS CASSIE HAD NO INTEREST IN IT.
SO, ONE DAY, ALAN ASKED TO BORROW SOME TOOLS FOR A COMMISSION. I TOOK HIM TO THE WAREHOUSE AND AFTER HE SAW IT ALL, HE GOT THE IDEA.
WE STARTED TALKING... THEN PLANNING... THEN WORKING.
AND A FEW YEARS LATER, WE BECAME RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL. BDSM IS NOT MY THING PERSONALLY, BUT IT PAYS THE BILLS. ON THE FLIPSIDE, THOUGH...
TO THANK ME FOR ALL THE HELP, ALAN DEFILED MY SISTER AND HER HUSBAND'S MINDS WITH HIS PERVINESS.
I'MMA DEFILE YOUR ASS WITH MY HEEL!
REALLY? YOU DO THAT TO TOM?
OH, RIGHT! I APOLOGIZE! I FORGOT YOUR ASS IS WELL OCCUPIED WITH THAT STICK OF YOURS.
I LIKED CASSIE AND CHRIS. THEY WERE SO OPPOSITE, BUT STILL GOT ALONG. I COULD DEFINITELY RELATE.
EVEN THOUGH MIKE, MY OLDER BROTHER, WAS OBLIVIOUS TO MY OWN... TASTES...WE HAD THE VERY SAME DYNAMIC.
SO, YOU'RE INTO BDSM TOO?
WELL...MY HUSBAND AND I ARE IN NO WAY AT THE LEVEL YOU SEE IN THE CLUB, BUT WE ARE LEARNING.

HEH... NOOBS.
OH, ALLY. I ALWAYS LOVED YOUR MATURITY!
'SCUSE ME?
OH, DON'T MIND ME. I ALWAYS FOUND NOOBIES ADORABLE.
US HIGH LEVEL PLAYERS ARE USUALLY LIKE THAT.
I DID SAY CASSIE REMINDED ALLY OF HER SISTER...
AH, WELL. THE WAY I SEE IT IS: I'M A HAPPILY MARRIED WOMAN WITH A RICH SEX LIFE, SO THE OPINION OF A PALE, INDOORSY WALLFLOWER MEANS LITTLE TO NOTHING TO ME.
YOU'RE PALE TOO.
I'M GINGER. WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?
HEH.
HEY, TOM. OVER HERE!
WELL PLAYED!
THANK YOU!
IN HINDSIGHT, THIS SITUATION COULD HAVE GONE HORRIBLY BAD...
BUT TO MY PLEASANT SURPRISE, ALLY WAS BETTER THAN THAT.
SO, GUESS WHO USED HIS INCREDIBLE POWERS OF PERSUASION TO CUT IN LINE AND GET THE TICKETS?!
ARE YOU METAL?
AW... MY HERO!
ALSO, WHAT POWERS OF PERSUASION?


ANYWAYS, GIRLS, THIS IS TOM, MY HUBBY. TOM, MEET LISA AND ALLISON.
HI THERE! NICE TO MEET YOU! OH, AND LIVE LONG AND MULTIPLY!
IT'S PROSP--
THAT'S IT!
WHAAAA?
I THOUGHT IT WAS YOUR FACE, BUT IT'S YOUR HAIR AND SHIRT!
I WAS NEVER MUCH OF A TREK FAN, BUT I KNEW ENOUGH TO REALIZE THAT WHAT WAS SEEN...
YOU TOTALLY LOOK LIKE A VULCAN!
COULD NOT BE UNSEEN!
MOVE IT, ALAN. COMING THROUGH!
STOP LAUGHING!
SNORT! M-HM!
SO, YOU ONE OF THOSE WHAT'CHA-MA-CALL-ITS? TREKKIES?
NO!
NOW, NOW! DON'T GET ANGRY! IT DOESN'T BEFIT YOUR SPECIES.
I MEAN, SURELY YOU CAN SEE THE LOGIC IN MY PRESUMPTIONS!
THERE IS NO LOGIC IN-- AH, CRAP! I WALKED INTO THAT ONE.
KHHH!

SO, I WAS WONDERING... IS IT *STILL* CALLED PON FARR IF IT INVOLVES BONDAGE?
OH, FOR *FUCK'S* SAKE.

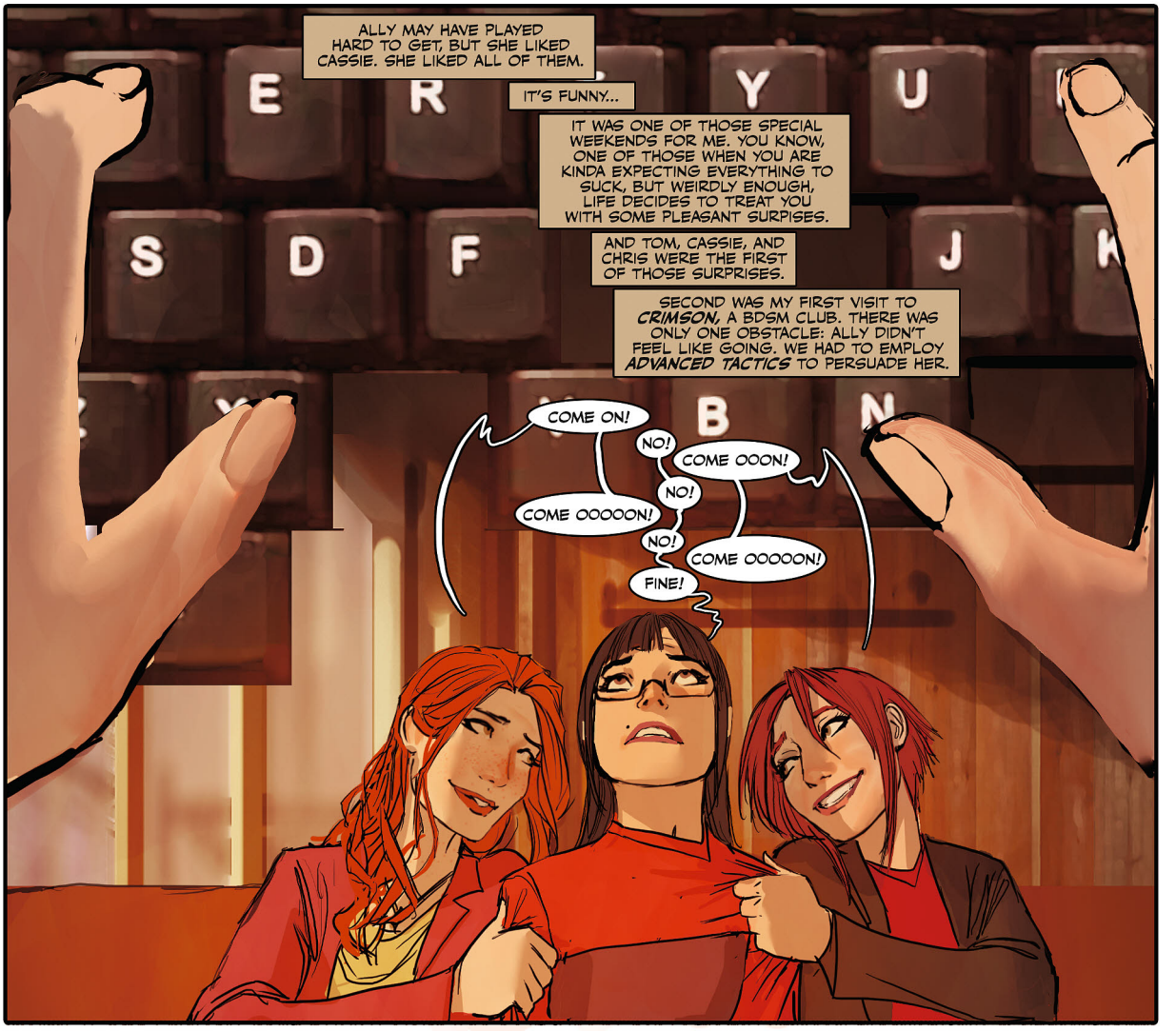

HM, YOU KNOW, I NEVER FIGURED CASSIE FOR A TREK FAN.
OH, THAT. SHE ISN'T...BUT YOU ARE, SO SHE WORKED ON HER ARSENAL OF BURNS TO USE ABOUT YOUR SEX-LIFE.
WELL, THAT'S JUST WRONG!
HEY, MAN... SHE'S A *LAWYER*. SHE *PREPARES* FOR HER ARGUMENTS. WITH YOU RIPPING ON US ALL THE TIME, WHAT DID YOU THINK SHE WOULD DO?

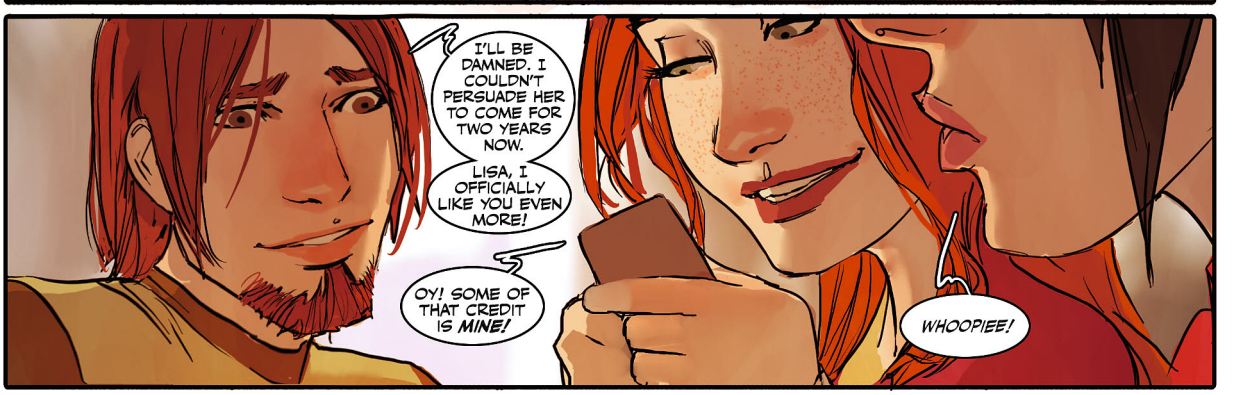

OH, TOM. TAKE A PIC!

I DO *NOT* LOOK LIKE A VULCAN, DAMMIT!
OKAY...EVERYBODY SAY, "LIVE LONG AND PROSPER!"
AW! YEAH...YOU *KINDA* DO... JUST A *LITTLE* BIT.

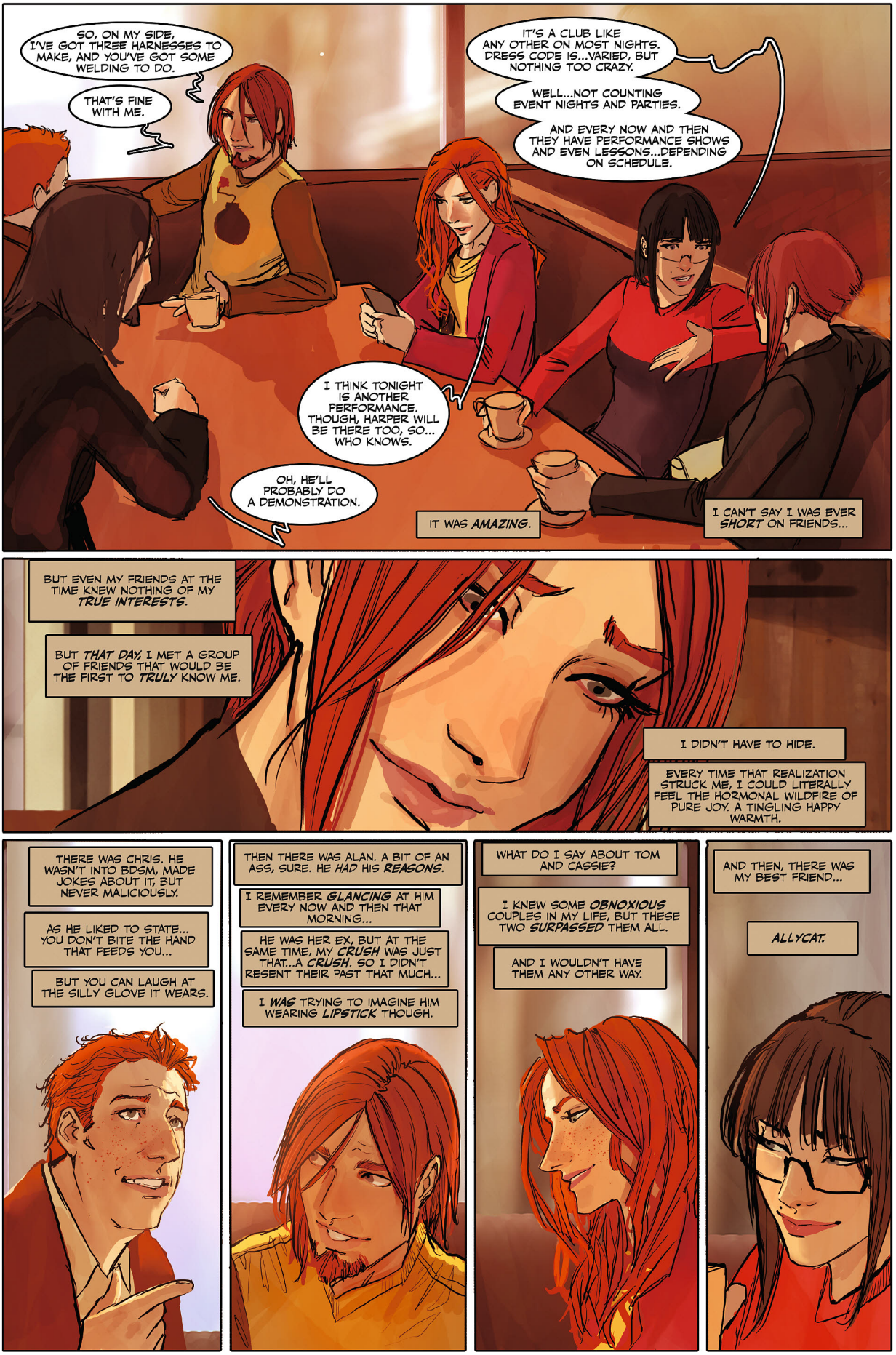
ALLY MAY HAVE PLAYED *HARD TO GET*, BUT...
UGH.
YUP! NOW *THAT'S* THE CHICKEN!
HEH!
TICK
TICKY
TICK
TICK

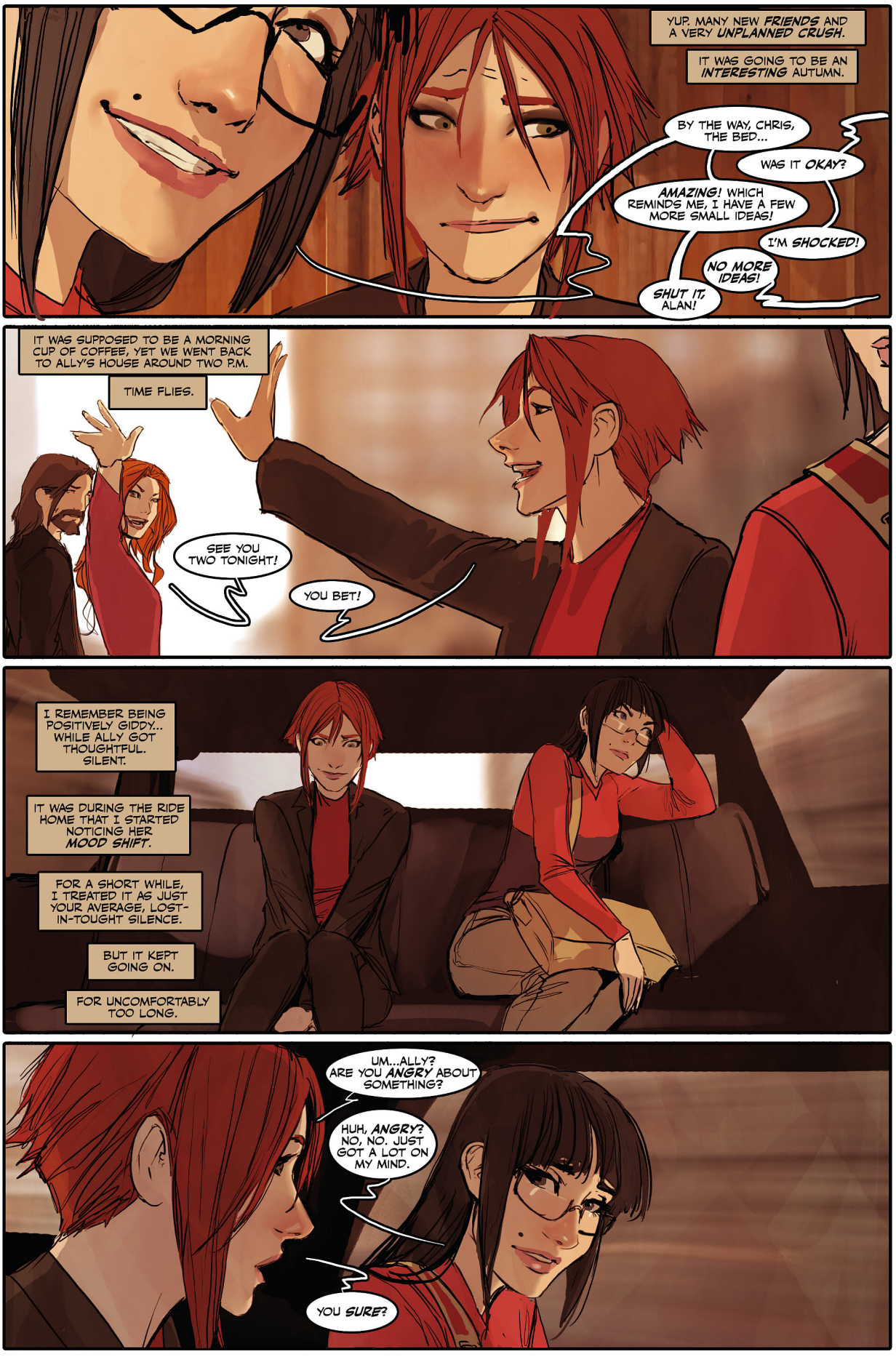
PHEW.
ALRIGHTY. WHERE WAS I?
LET'S SEE NOW...
ALLY MAY HAVE PLAYED *HARD TO GET*, BUT...
SHE WAS WORTH ALL MY EFFORTS!
SHE HAD COMPLETELY RUINED ME FOR ANYONE ELSE. SHE WAS THE SEXIEST WOMAN I EVER LAID MY EYES ON, AND HER PROWESS MADE ME WRITHE IN...
OH, WHAT THE FUCK?
ALLY, WHAT THE HELL!
TRUE STORY, HONEY!
FOR CRYING OUT LOUD! DID YOU EVEN READ *WHERE* WE WERE?
NOPE, BUT I FIGURED IT WAS SO *UNIVERSALLY* TRUE THAT THE PARAGRAPH WOULD FIT JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE!
REALLY?
YOU KNOW IT!
ANYWHERE?
I STAND BY IT!
I'M JUST WRITING ABOUT OUR FIRST NIGHT IN THE *CLUB*.
ALL THE SAME-- *OH!*
HEH, YEAH... *THAT!*

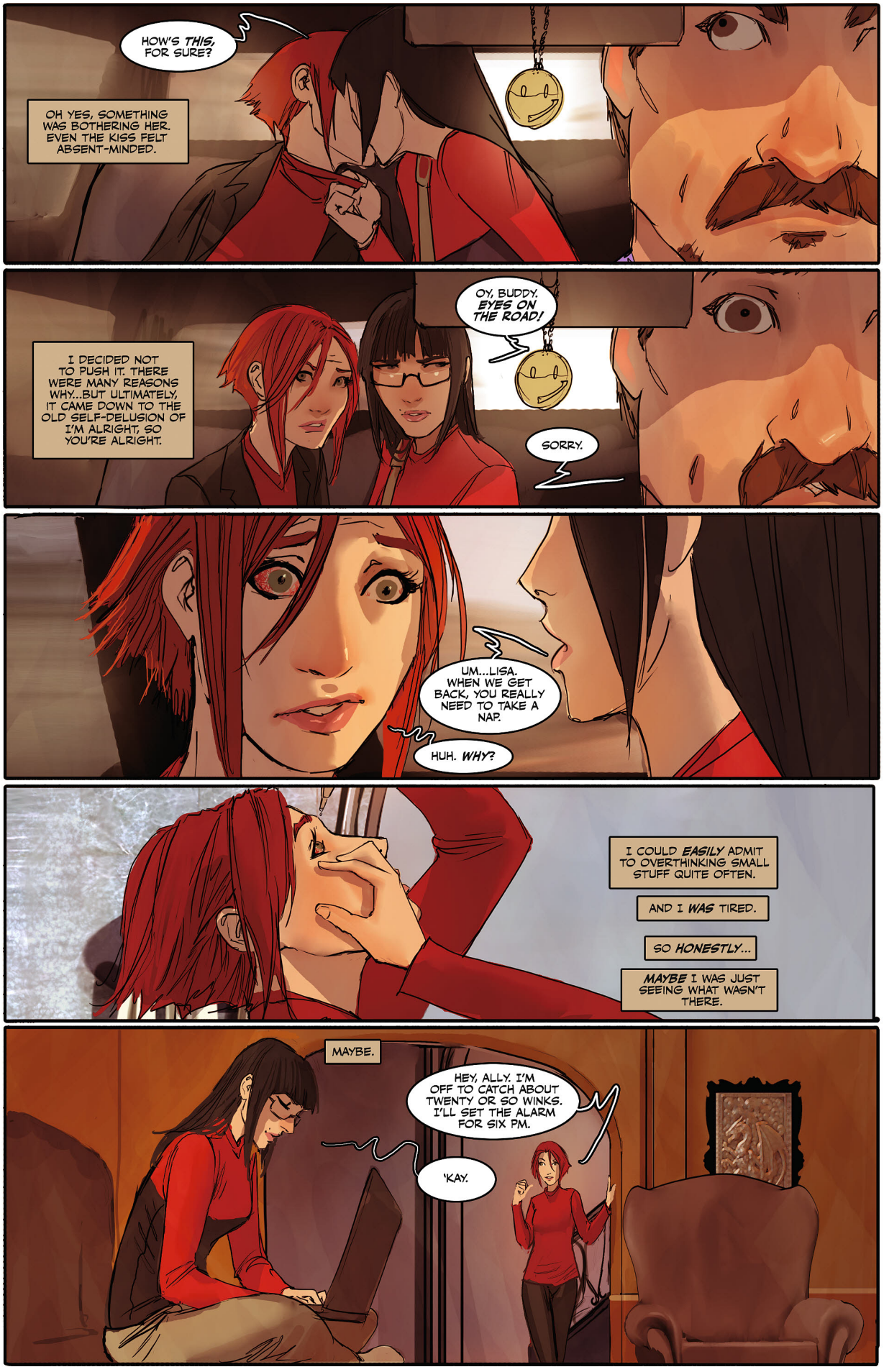

ALLY MAY HAVE PLAYED HARD TO GET, BUT SHE LIKED CASSIE. SHE LIKED ALL OF THEM.
IT'S FUNNY...
IT WAS ONE OF THOSE SPECIAL WEEKENDS FOR ME. YOU KNOW, ONE OF THOSE WHEN YOU ARE KINDA EXPECTING EVERYTHING TO SUCK, BUT WEIRDLY ENOUGH, LIFE DECIDES TO TREAT YOU WITH SOME PLEASANT SURPRISES.
AND TOM, CASSIE, AND CHRIS WERE THE FIRST OF THOSE SURPRISES.
SECOND WAS MY FIRST VISIT TO CRIMSON, A BDSM CLUB. THERE WAS ONLY ONE OBSTACLE: ALLY DIDN'T FEEL LIKE GOING. WE HAD TO EMPLOY ADVANCED TACTICS TO PERSUADE HER.
COME ON!
NO!
COME OOON!
NO!
COME OOOOON!
NO!
COME OOOOON!
FINE!

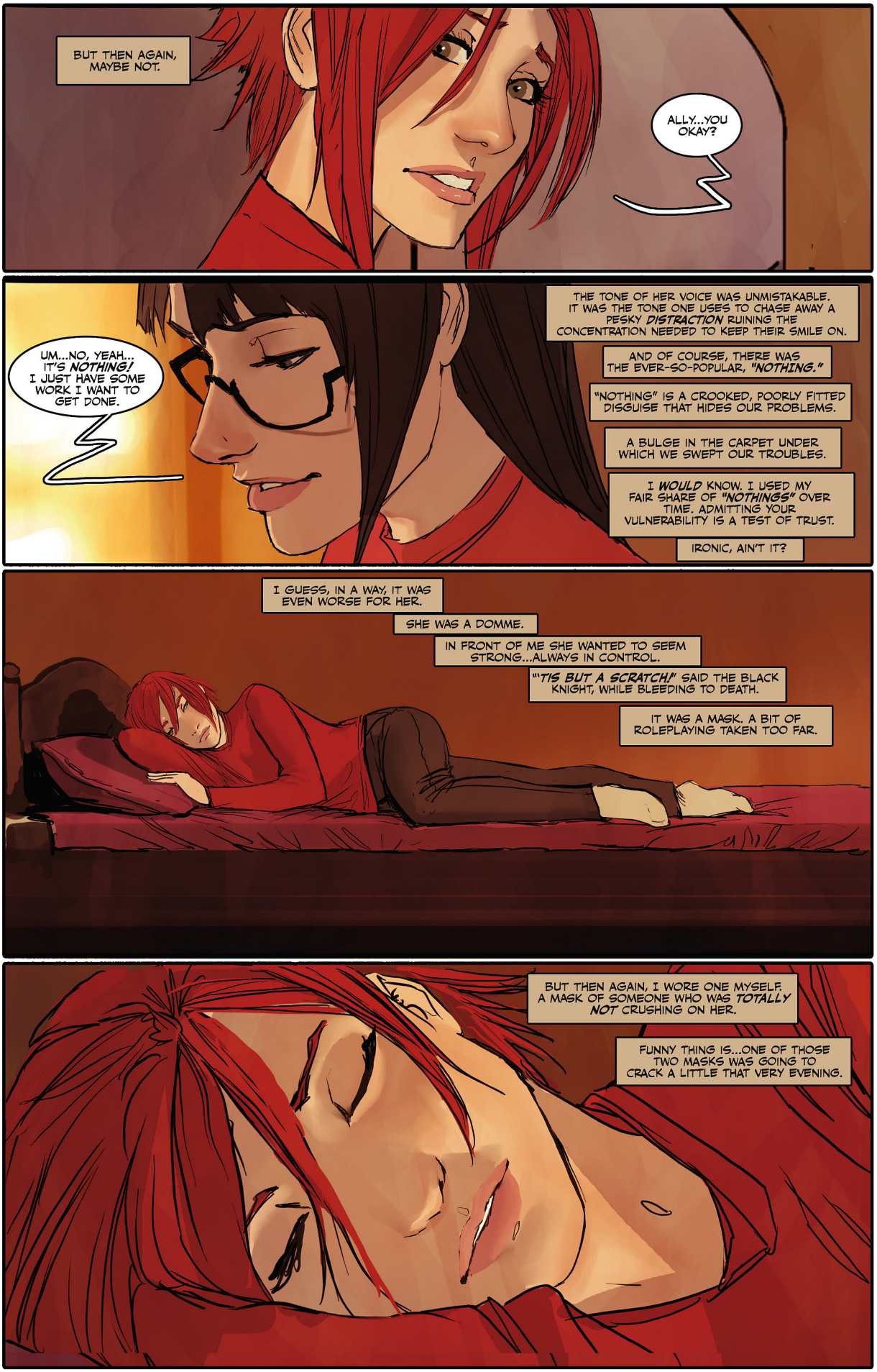

I'LL BE DAMNED. I COULDN'T PERSUADE HER TO COME FOR TWO YEARS NOW.
LISA, I OFFICIALLY LIKE YOU EVEN MORE!
OY! SOME OF THAT CREDIT IS MINE!
WHOOPIEE!

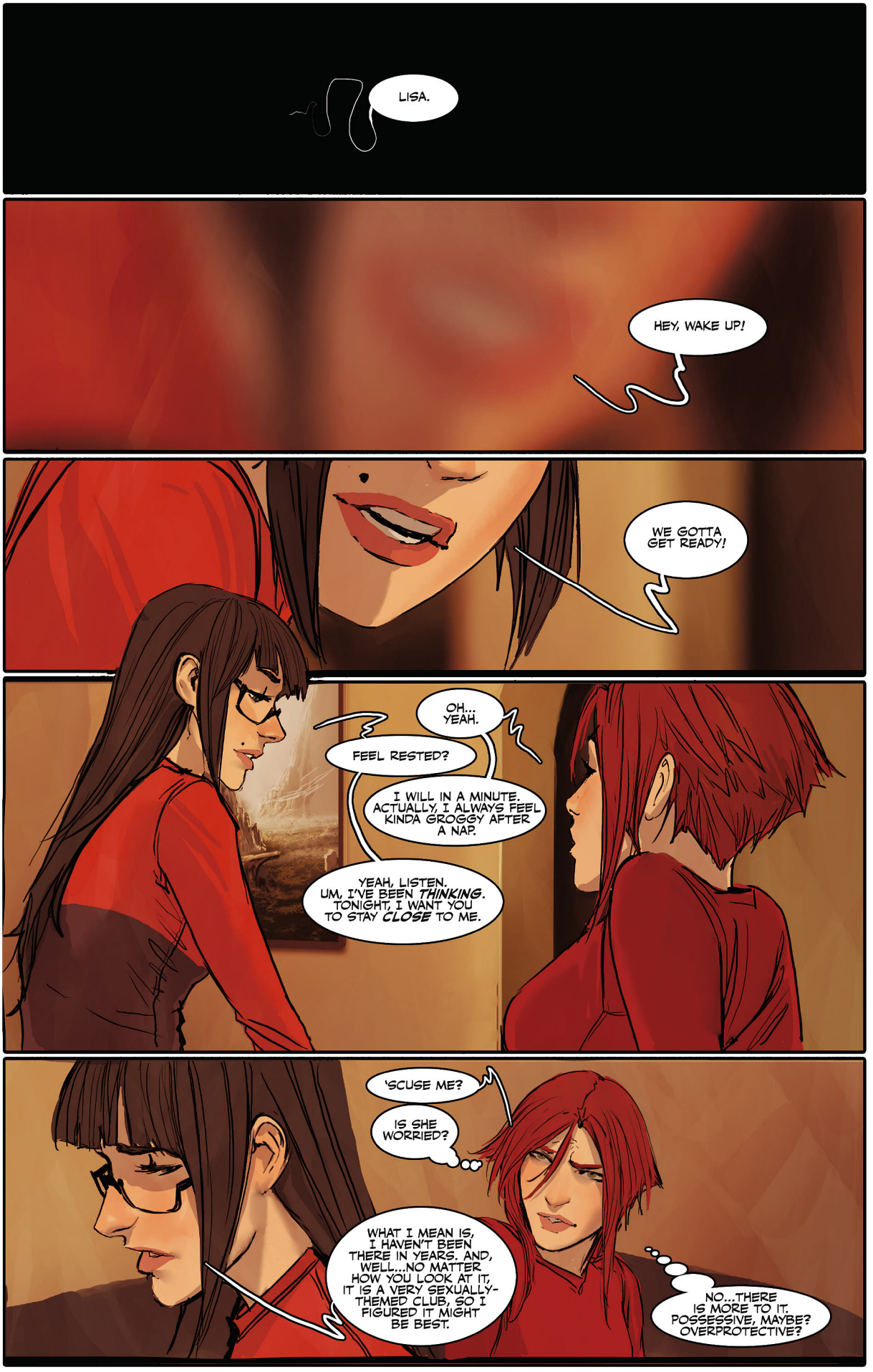
OH! I'LL ASK ANNE IF SHE'D LIKE TO JOIN US.
I THINK SHE MENTIONED SOME JOB SHE HAD TO DO.
DOESN'T HURT TO TRY.
SO, WHAT'S THIS CLUB LIKE?
WELL, IT WAS OKAY THE LAST TIME I WAS THERE TWO YEARS AGO.


SO, ON MY SIDE, I'VE GOT THREE HARNESSES TO MAKE, AND YOU'VE GOT SOME WELDING TO DO.
THAT'S FINE WITH ME.
IT'S A CLUB LIKE ANY OTHER ON MOST NIGHTS. DRESS CODE IS...VARIED, BUT NOTHING TOO CRAZY.
WELL...NOT COUNTING EVENT NIGHTS AND PARTIES.
AND EVERY NOW AND THEN THEY HAVE PERFORMANCE SHOWS AND EVEN LESSONS...DEPENDING ON SCHEDULE.
I THINK TONIGHT IS ANOTHER PERFORMANCE. THOUGH, HARPER WILL BE THERE TOO, SO... WHO KNOWS.
OH, HE'LL PROBABLY DO A DEMONSTRATION.
IT WAS AMAZING.
I CAN'T SAY I WAS EVER SHORT ON FRIENDS...
BUT EVEN MY FRIENDS AT THE TIME KNEW NOTHING OF MY TRUE INTERESTS.
BUT THAT DAY, I MET A GROUP OF FRIENDS THAT WOULD BE THE FIRST TO TRULY KNOW ME.
I DIDN'T HAVE TO HIDE.
EVERY TIME THAT REALIZATION STRUCK ME, I COULD LITERALLY FEEL THE HORMONAL WILDFIRE OF PURE JOY. A TINGLING HAPPY WARMTH.
THERE WAS CHRIS. HE WASN'T INTO BDSM, MADE JOKES ABOUT IT, BUT NEVER MALICIOUSLY.
AS HE LIKED TO STATE... YOU DON'T BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU...
BUT YOU CAN LAUGH AT THE SILLY GLOVE IT WEARS.
THEN THERE WAS ALAN. A BIT OF AN ASS, SURE. HE HAD HIS REASONS.
I REMEMBER GLANCING AT HIM EVERY NOW AND THEN THAT MORNING...
HE WAS HER EX, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, MY CRUSH WAS JUST THAT...A CRUSH. SO I DIDN'T RESENT THEIR PAST THAT MUCH...
I WAS TRYING TO IMAGINE HIM WEARING LIPSTICK THOUGH.
WHAT DO I SAY ABOUT TOM AND CASSIE?
I KNEW SOME OBNOXIOUS COUPLES IN MY LIFE, BUT THESE TWO SURPASSED THEM ALL.
AND I WOULDN'T HAVE THEM ANY OTHER WAY.
AND THEN, THERE WAS MY BEST FRIEND...
ALLYCAT.

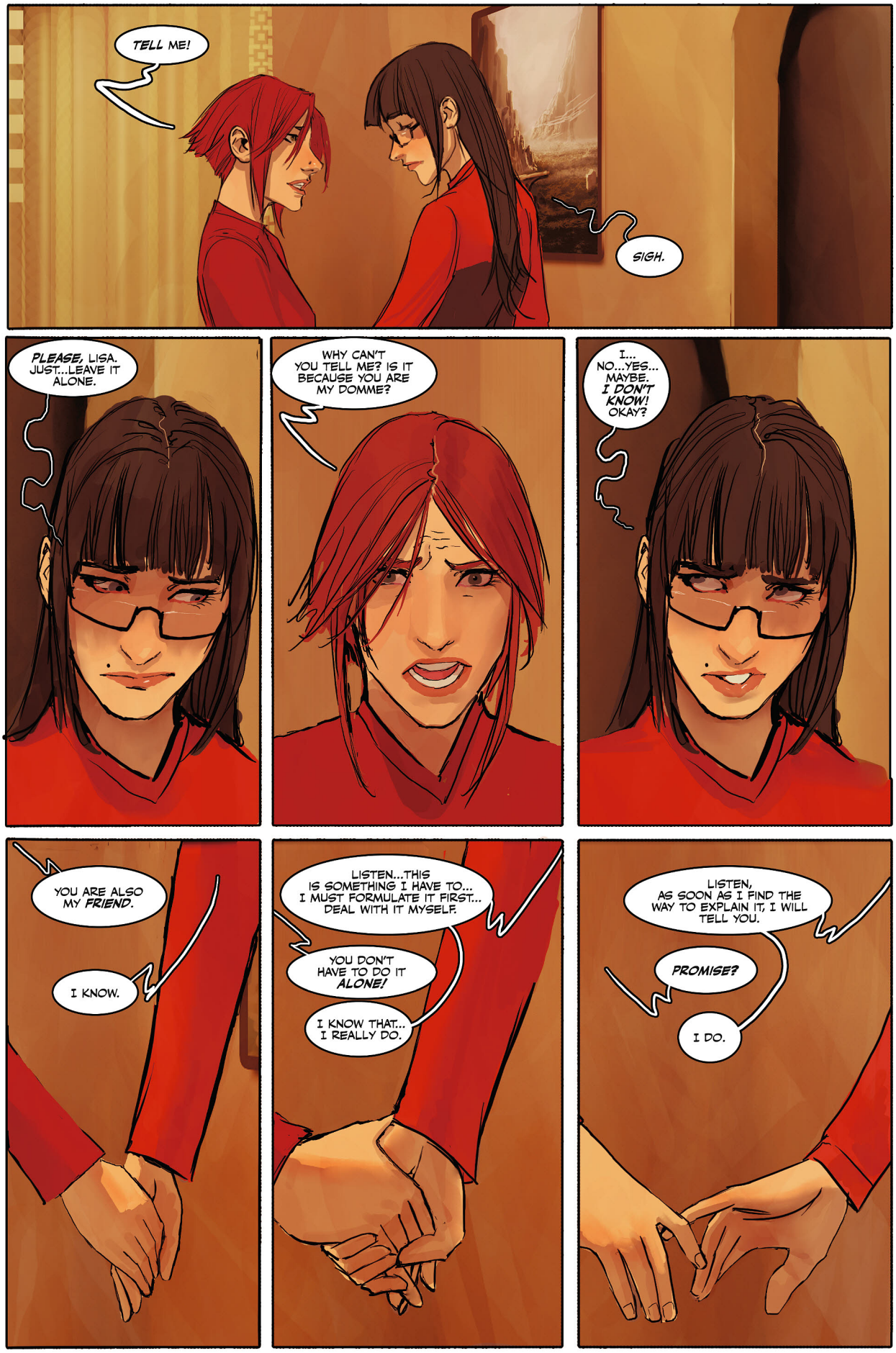

YUP. MANY NEW FRIENDS AND A VERY UNPLANNED CRUSH.
IT WAS GOING TO BE AN INTERESTING AUTUMN.
BY THE WAY, CHRIS, THE BED...
WAS IT OKAY?
AMAZING! WHICH REMINDS ME, I HAVE A FEW MORE SMALL IDEAS!
I'M SHOCKED!
NO MORE IDEAS!
SHUT IT, ALAN!
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A MORNING CUP OF COFFEE, YET WE WENT BACK TO ALLY'S HOUSE AROUND TWO P.M.
TIME FLIES.
SEE YOU TWO TONIGHT!
YOU BET!
I REMEMBER BEING POSITIVELY GIDDY... WHILE ALLY GOT THOUGHTFUL. SILENT.
IT WAS DURING THE RIDE HOME THAT I STARTED NOTICING HER MOOD SHIFT.
FOR A SHORT WHILE, I TREATED IT AS JUST YOUR AVERAGE, LOST-IN-TOUGHT SILENCE.
BUT IT KEPT GOING ON.
FOR UNCOMFORTABLY TOO LONG.
UM...ALLY? ARE YOU ANGRY ABOUT SOMETHING?
HUH, ANGRY? NO, NO. JUST GOT A LOT ON MY MIND.
YOU SURE?

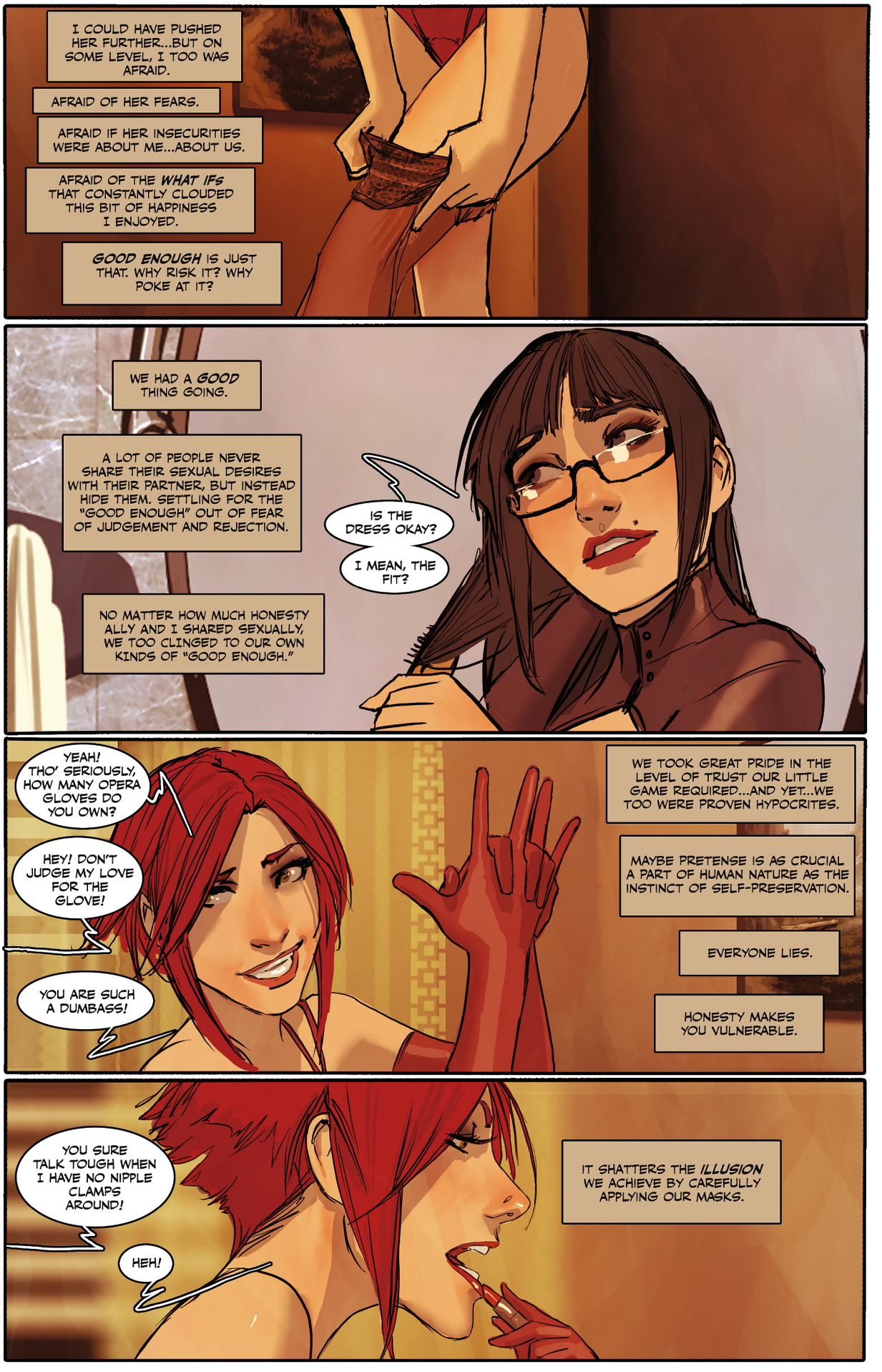

HOW'S *THIS*, FOR SURE?
OH YES, SOMETHING WAS BOTHERING HER. EVEN THE KISS FELT ABSENT-MINDED.
I DECIDED NOT TO PUSH IT. THERE WERE MANY REASONS WHY...BUT ULTIMATELY, IT CAME DOWN TO THE OLD SELF-DELUSION OF I'M ALRIGHT, SO YOU'RE ALRIGHT.
OY, BUDDY. *EYES ON THE ROAD!*
SORRY.
UM...LISA. WHEN WE GET BACK, YOU REALLY NEED TO TAKE A NAP.
HUH. *WHY?*
I COULD *EASILY* ADMIT TO OVERTHINKING SMALL STUFF QUITE OFTEN.
AND I *WAS* TIRED.
SO *HONESTLY*...
MAYBE I WAS JUST SEEING WHAT WASN'T THERE.
MAYBE.
HEY, ALLY. I'M OFF TO CATCH ABOUT TWENTY OR SO WINKS. I'LL SET THE ALARM FOR SIX PM.
'KAY.


BUT THEN AGAIN, MAYBE NOT.
ALLY...YOU OKAY?
UM...NO, YEAH... IT'S *NOTHING!* I JUST HAVE SOME WORK I WANT TO GET DONE.
THE TONE OF HER VOICE WAS UNMISTAKABLE. IT WAS THE TONE ONE USES TO CHASE AWAY A PESKY *DISTRACTION* RUINING THE CONCENTRATION NEEDED TO KEEP THEIR SMILE ON.
AND OF COURSE, THERE WAS THE EVER-SO-POPULAR, *"NOTHING."*
"NOTHING" IS A CROOKED, POORLY FITTED DISGUISE THAT HIDES OUR PROBLEMS.
A BULGE IN THE CARPET UNDER WHICH WE SWEPT OUR TROUBLES.
I *WOULD* KNOW. I USED MY FAIR SHARE OF *"NOTHINGS"* OVER TIME. ADMITTING YOUR VULNERABILITY IS A TEST OF TRUST.
IRONIC, AIN'T IT?
I GUESS, IN A WAY, IT WAS EVEN WORSE FOR HER.
SHE WAS A DOMME.
IN FRONT OF ME SHE WANTED TO SEEM STRONG...ALWAYS IN CONTROL.
"'TIS BUT A SCRATCH!" SAID THE BLACK KNIGHT, WHILE BLEEDING TO DEATH.
IT WAS A MASK. A BIT OF ROLEPLAYING TAKEN TOO FAR.
BUT THEN AGAIN, I WORE ONE MYSELF. A MASK OF SOMEONE WHO WAS *TOTALLY NOT* CRUSHING ON HER.
FUNNY THING IS...ONE OF THOSE TWO MASKS WAS GOING TO CRACK A LITTLE THAT VERY EVENING.


LISA.
HEY, WAKE UP!
WE GOTTA GET READY!
OH... YEAH.
FEEL RESTED?
I WILL IN A MINUTE. ACTUALLY, I ALWAYS FEEL KINDA GROGGY AFTER A NAP.
YEAH, LISTEN. UM, I'VE BEEN *THINKING*. TONIGHT, I WANT YOU TO STAY *CLOSE* TO ME.
'SCUSE ME?
IS SHE WORRIED?
WHAT I MEAN IS, I HAVEN'T BEEN THERE IN YEARS. AND, WELL...NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, IT IS A VERY SEXUALLY-THEMED CLUB, SO I FIGURED IT MIGHT BE BEST.
NO...THERE IS MORE TO IT. POSSESSIVE, MAYBE? OVERPROTECTIVE?

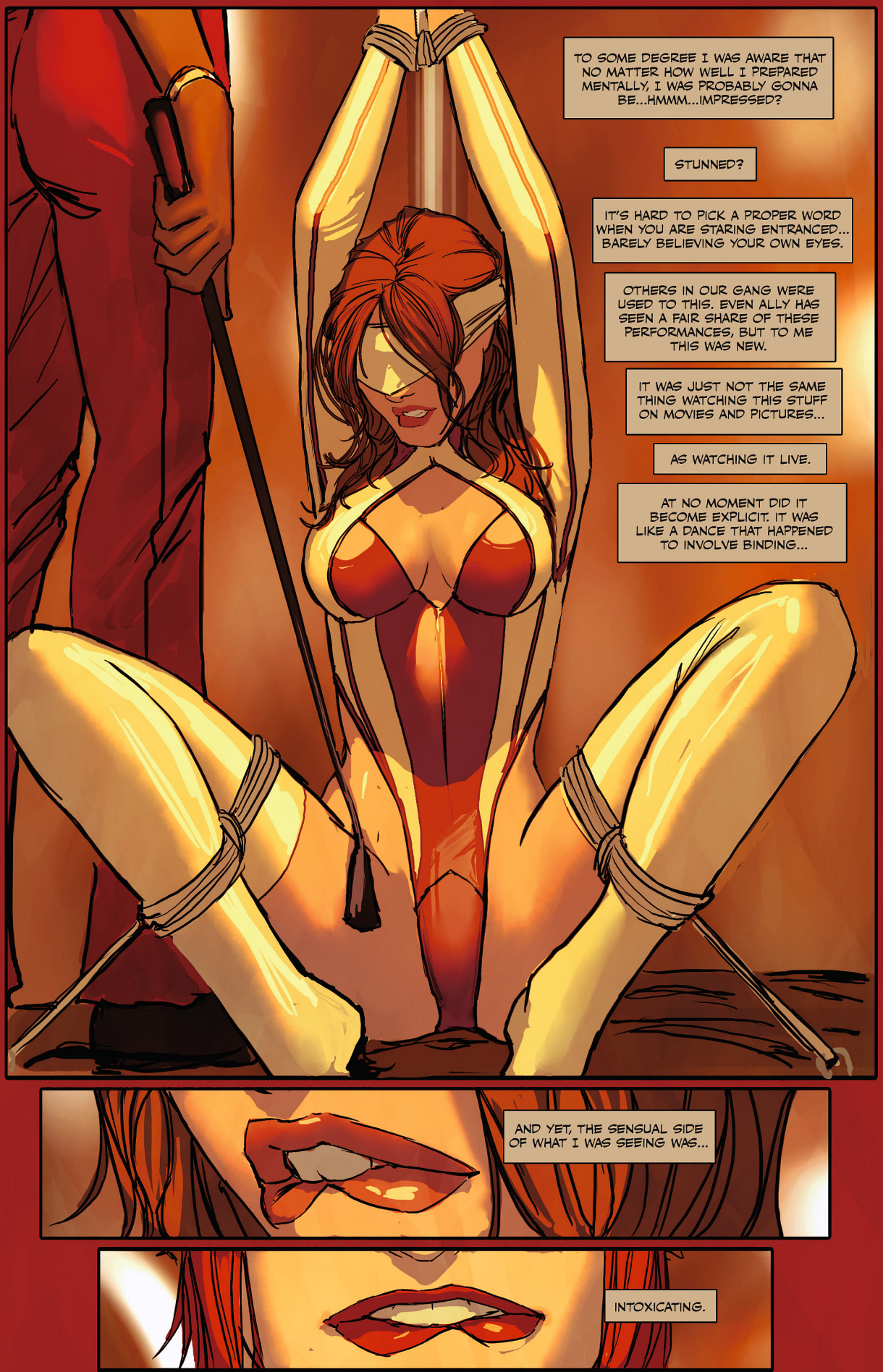
SO, ANYWAYS, I PREPARED SOME STUFF THAT MIGHT FIT YOU.
ALLISON, WAIT! YOU KNOW...I MAY BE A SEXUALLY-SUBMISSIVE PERSON, BUT I'M NOT SOCIALLY INEPT...I'M NOT A CHILD! I HAD A LIFE BEFORE WE MET, YOU KNOW!
I...NO, LISA. I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT. I...JUST...
JUST WHAT? I'M NOT AN IDIOT... I CAN SEE SOMETHING HAS BEEN EATING AT YOU TODAY.
REALLY, IT'S NOTHING.
ALLY, WAIT!

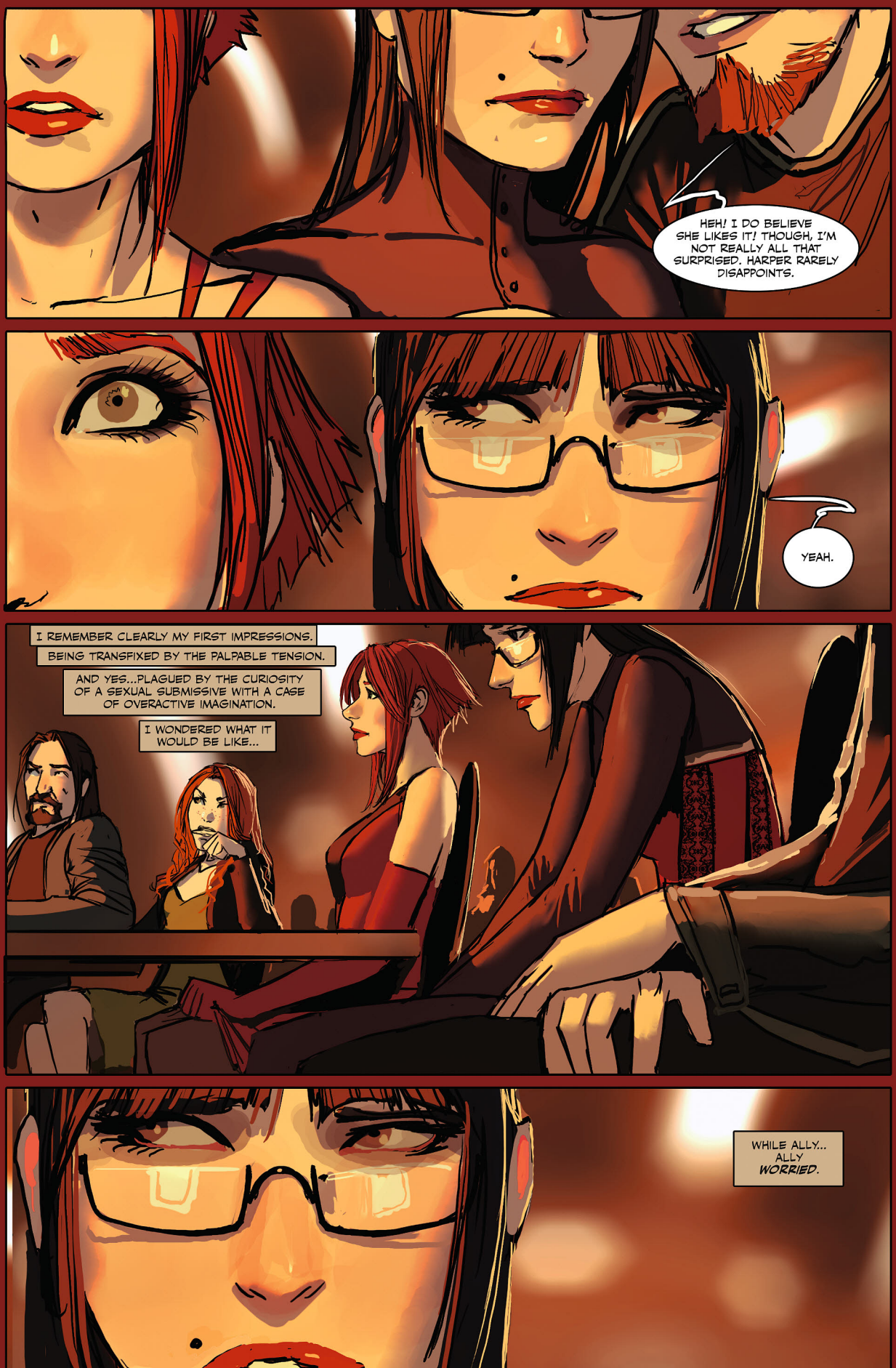

TELL ME!
SIGH.
PLEASE, LISA. JUST...LEAVE IT ALONE.
WHY CAN'T YOU TELL ME? IS IT BECAUSE YOU ARE MY DOMME?
I... NO...YES... MAYBE. I DON'T KNOW! OKAY?
YOU ARE ALSO MY FRIEND.
I KNOW.
LISTEN...THIS IS SOMETHING I HAVE TO... I MUST FORMULATE IT FIRST... DEAL WITH IT MYSELF.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE!
I KNOW THAT... I REALLY DO.
LISTEN, AS SOON AS I FIND THE WAY TO EXPLAIN IT, I WILL TELL YOU.
PROMISE?
I DO.

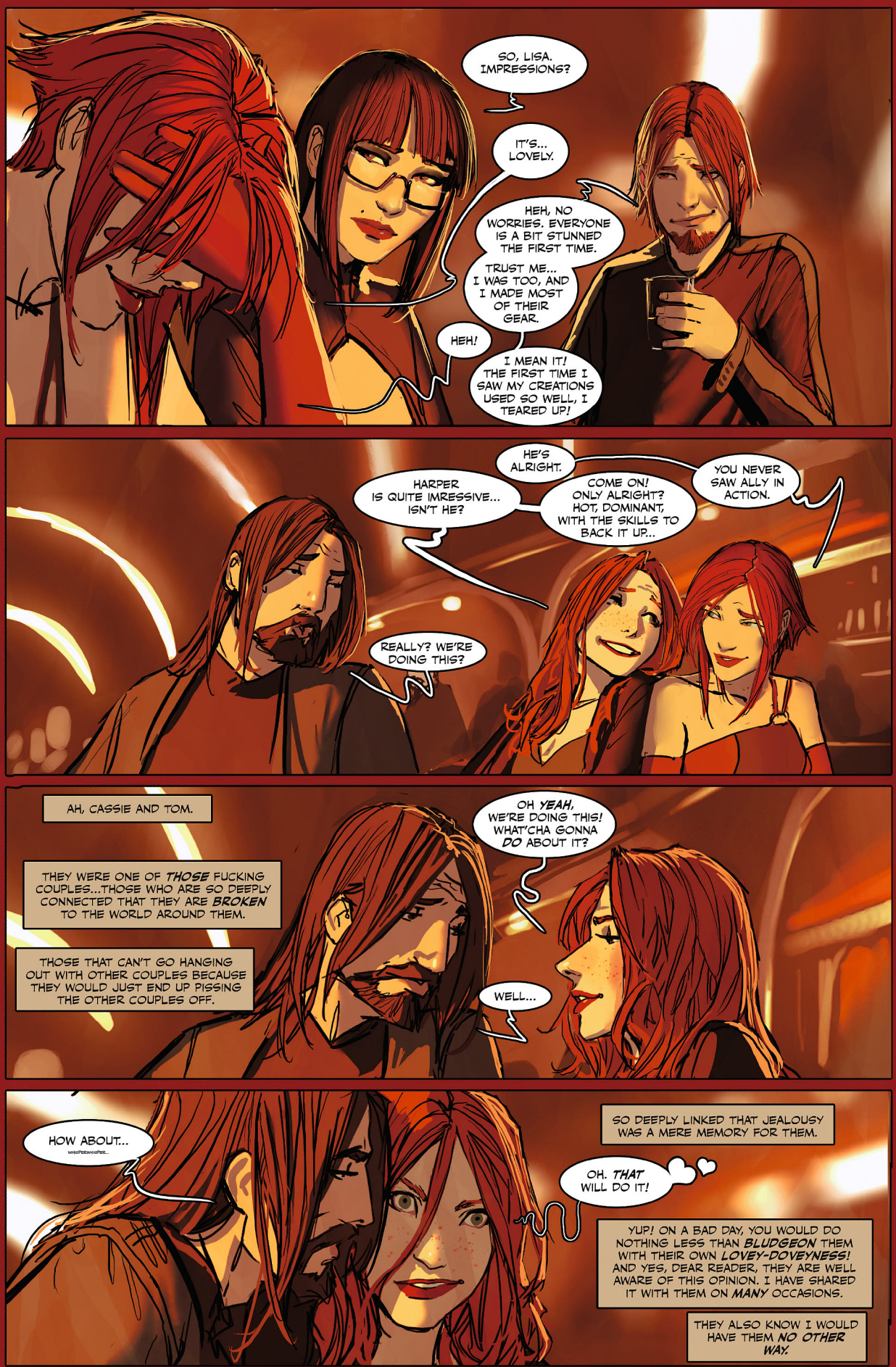

I COULD HAVE PUSHED HER FURTHER...BUT ON SOME LEVEL, I TOO WAS AFRAID.
AFRAID OF HER FEARS.
AFRAID IF HER INSECURITIES WERE ABOUT ME...ABOUT US.
AFRAID OF THE *WHAT IFs* THAT CONSTANTLY CLOUDED THIS BIT OF HAPPINESS I ENJOYED.
GOOD ENOUGH IS JUST THAT. WHY RISK IT? WHY POKE AT IT?
WE HAD A *GOOD* THING GOING.
A LOT OF PEOPLE NEVER SHARE THEIR SEXUAL DESIRES WITH THEIR PARTNER, BUT INSTEAD HIDE THEM. SETTLING FOR THE "GOOD ENOUGH" OUT OF FEAR OF JUDGEMENT AND REJECTION.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH HONESTY ALLY AND I SHARED SEXUALLY, WE TOO CLINGED TO OUR OWN KINDS OF "GOOD ENOUGH."
IS THE DRESS OKAY?
I MEAN, THE FIT?
YEAH! THO' SERIOUSLY, HOW MANY OPERA GLOVES DO YOU OWN?
HEY! DON'T JUDGE MY LOVE FOR THE GLOVE!
YOU ARE SUCH A DUMBASS!
WE TOOK GREAT PRIDE IN THE LEVEL OF TRUST OUR LITTLE GAME REQUIRED...AND YET...WE TOO WERE PROVEN HYPOCRITES.
MAYBE PRETENSE IS AS CRUCIAL A PART OF HUMAN NATURE AS THE INSTINCT OF SELF-PRESERVATION.
EVERYONE LIES.
HONESTY MAKES YOU VULNERABLE.
YOU SURE TALK TOUGH WHEN I HAVE NO NIPPLE CLAMPS AROUND!
HEH!
IT SHATTERS THE *ILLUSION* WE ACHIEVE BY CAREFULLY APPLYING OUR MASKS.

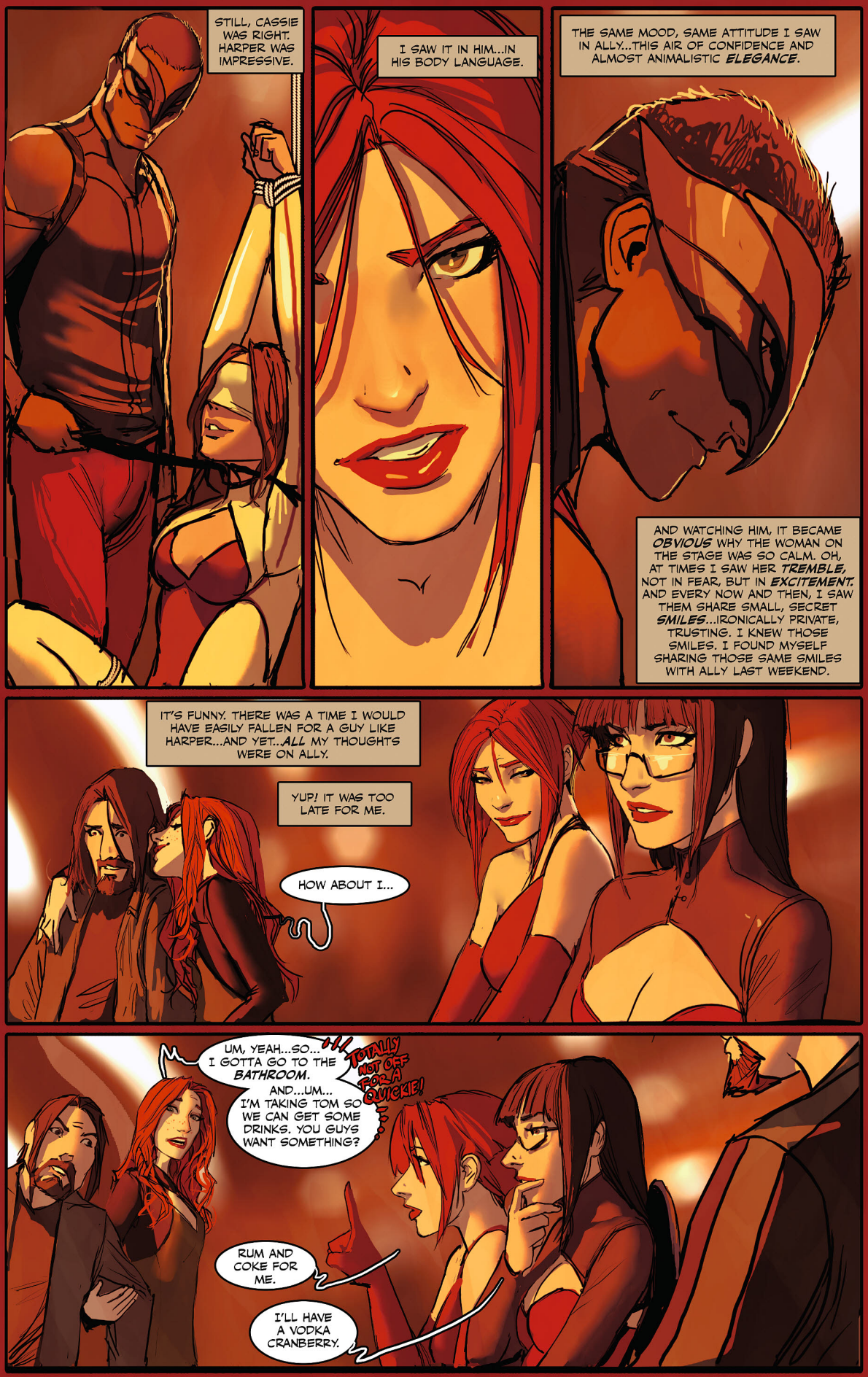
AND I WON'T LIE. AN ILLUSION CAN BE IMPRESSIVE.
A SIMPLE CHANGE OF CLOTHES AND ALLY WAS ONCE AGAIN SHIELDED BY HER DOMINATRIX AURA OF AWESOMENESS...
WELL, MOSTLY SHIELDED.
YEAH...I TAKE IT ALL BACK. YOU *ARE* STICKING NEAR ME...BUT FOR *BRAGGING RIGHTS!*
BRAGGING RIGHTS, HUH?
I'M *OKAY* WITH *THAT!*

SO...MY FIRST NIGHT AT THE CRIMSON...
IT WAS...ENLIGHTENING IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.


TO SOME DEGREE I WAS AWARE THAT NO MATTER HOW WELL I PREPARED MENTALLY, I WAS PROBABLY GONNA BE...HMMM...IMPRESSED?
STUNNED?
IT'S HARD TO PICK A PROPER WORD WHEN YOU ARE STARING ENTRANCED... BARELY BELIEVING YOUR OWN EYES.
OTHERS IN OUR GANG WERE USED TO THIS. EVEN ALLY HAS SEEN A FAIR SHARE OF THESE PERFORMANCES, BUT TO ME THIS WAS NEW.
IT WAS JUST NOT THE SAME THING WATCHING THIS STUFF ON MOVIES AND PICTURES...
AS WATCHING IT LIVE.
AT NO MOMENT DID IT BECOME EXPLICIT. IT WAS LIKE A DANCE THAT HAPPENED TO INVOLVE BINDING...
AND YET, THE SENSUAL SIDE OF WHAT I WAS SEEING WAS...
INTOXICATING.

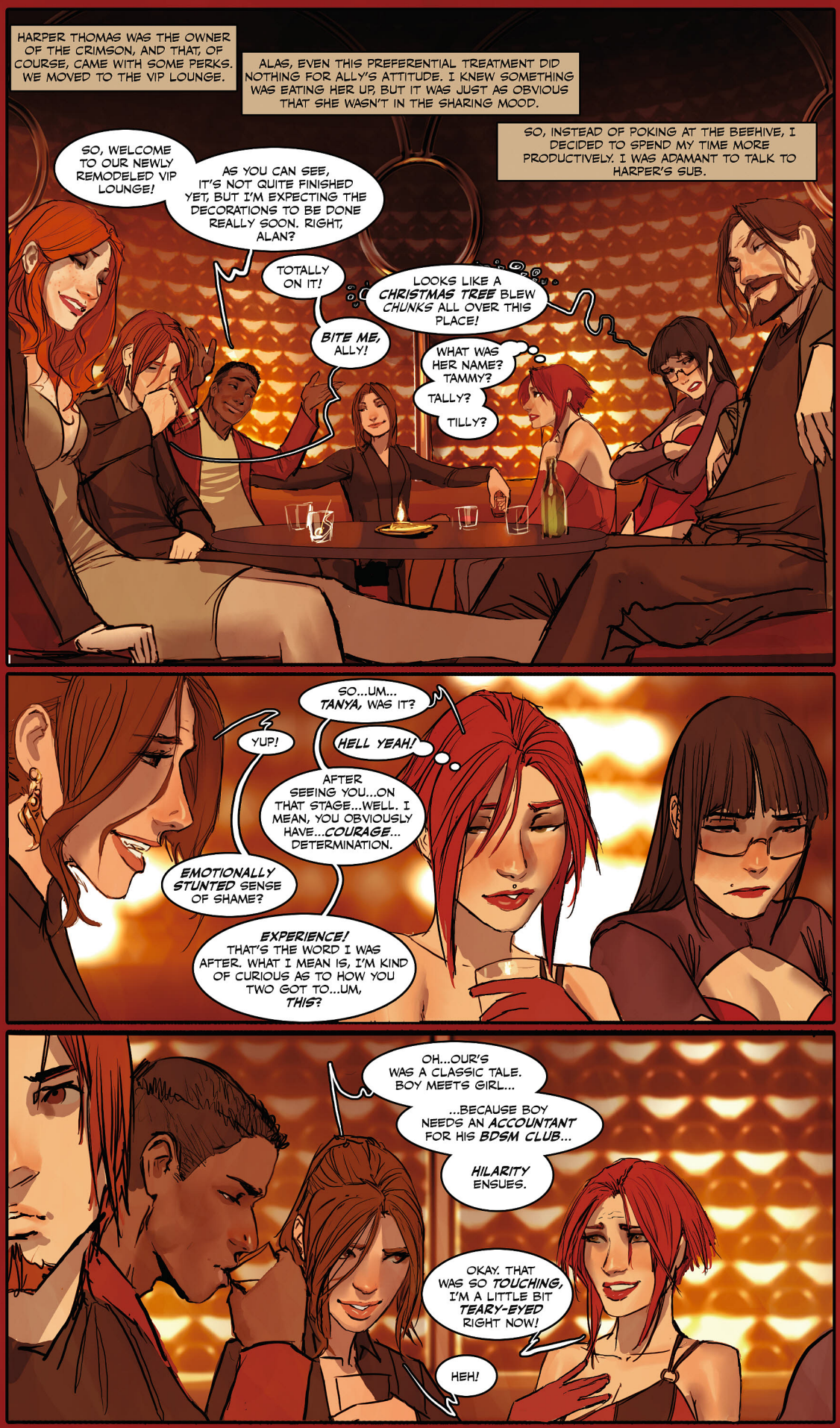

HEH! I DO BELIEVE SHE LIKES IT! THOUGH, I'M NOT REALLY ALL THAT SURPRISED. HARPER RARELY DISAPPOINTS.
YEAH.
I REMEMBER CLEARLY MY FIRST IMPRESSIONS.
BEING TRANSFIXED BY THE PALPABLE TENSION.
AND YES...PLAGUED BY THE CURIOSITY OF A SEXUAL SUBMISSIVE WITH A CASE OF OVERACTIVE IMAGINATION.
I WONDERED WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE...
WHILE ALLY... ALLY *WORRIED.*

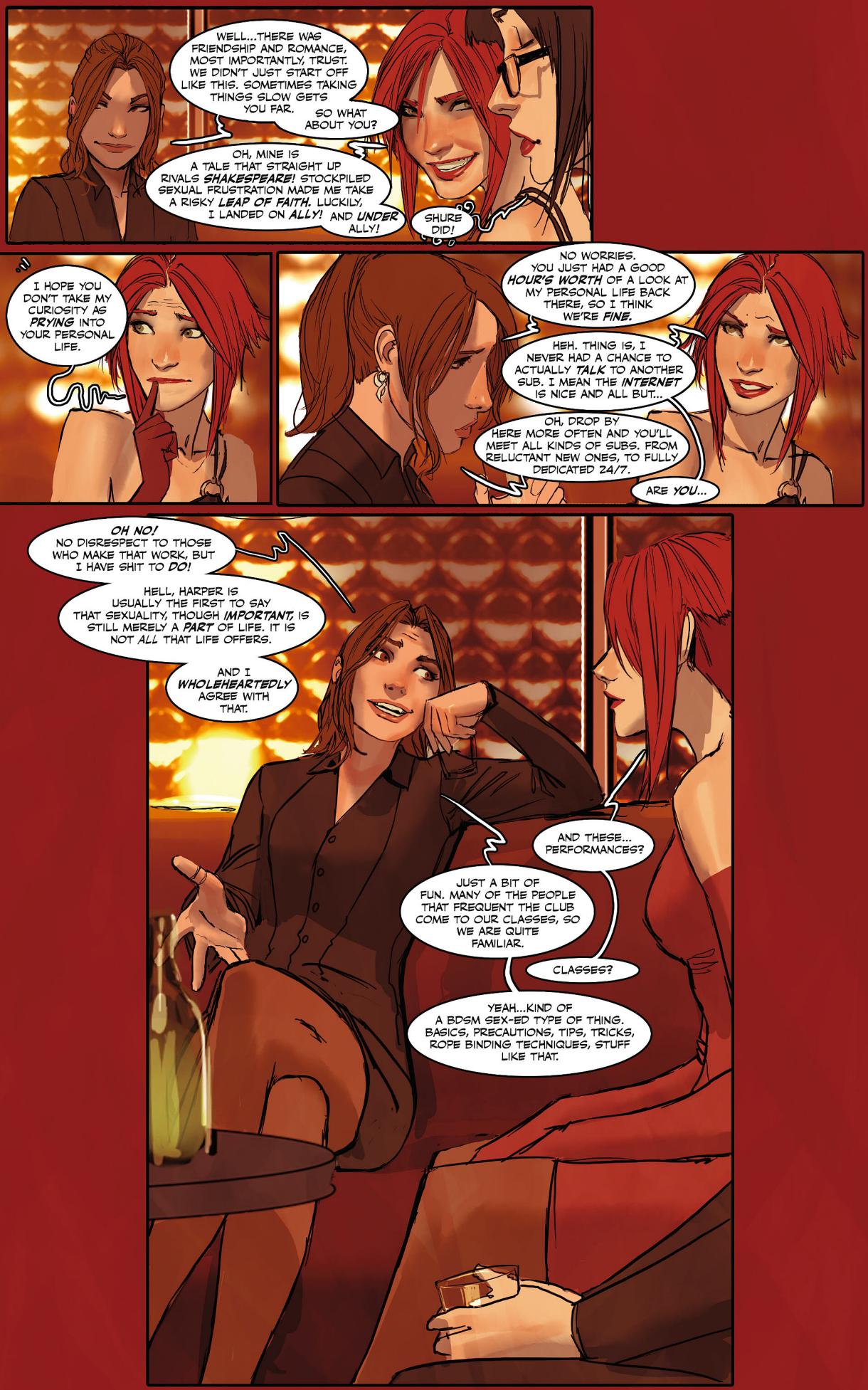

SO, LISA. IMPRESSIONS?
IT'S... LOVELY.
HEH, NO WORRIES. EVERYONE IS A BIT STUNNED THE FIRST TIME.
TRUST ME... I WAS TOO, AND I MADE MOST OF THEIR GEAR.
HEH!
I MEAN IT! THE FIRST TIME I SAW MY CREATIONS USED SO WELL, I TEARED UP!
HARPER IS QUITE IMRESSIVE... ISN'T HE?
HE'S ALRIGHT.
COME ON! ONLY ALRIGHT? HOT, DOMINANT, WITH THE SKILLS TO BACK IT UP...
YOU NEVER SAW ALLY IN ACTION.
REALLY? WE'RE DOING THIS?
AH, CASSIE AND TOM.
THEY WERE ONE OF *THOSE* FUCKING COUPLES...THOSE WHO ARE SO DEEPLY CONNECTED THAT THEY ARE *BROKEN* TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM.
THOSE THAT CAN'T GO HANGING OUT WITH OTHER COUPLES BECAUSE THEY WOULD JUST END UP PISSING THE OTHER COUPLES OFF.
OH *YEAH*, WE'RE DOING THIS! WHAT'CHA GONNA *DO* ABOUT IT?
WELL...
HOW ABOUT...
WHISPERWHISPER...
SO DEEPLY LINKED THAT JEALOUSY WAS A MERE MEMORY FOR THEM.
OH. *THAT* WILL DO IT!
YUP! ON A BAD DAY, YOU WOULD DO NOTHING LESS THAN *BLUDGEON* THEM WITH THEIR OWN *LOVEY-DOVEYNESS!* AND YES, DEAR READER, THEY ARE WELL AWARE OF THIS OPINION. I HAVE SHARED IT WITH THEM ON *MANY* OCCASIONS.
THEY ALSO KNOW I WOULD HAVE THEM *NO OTHER WAY.*

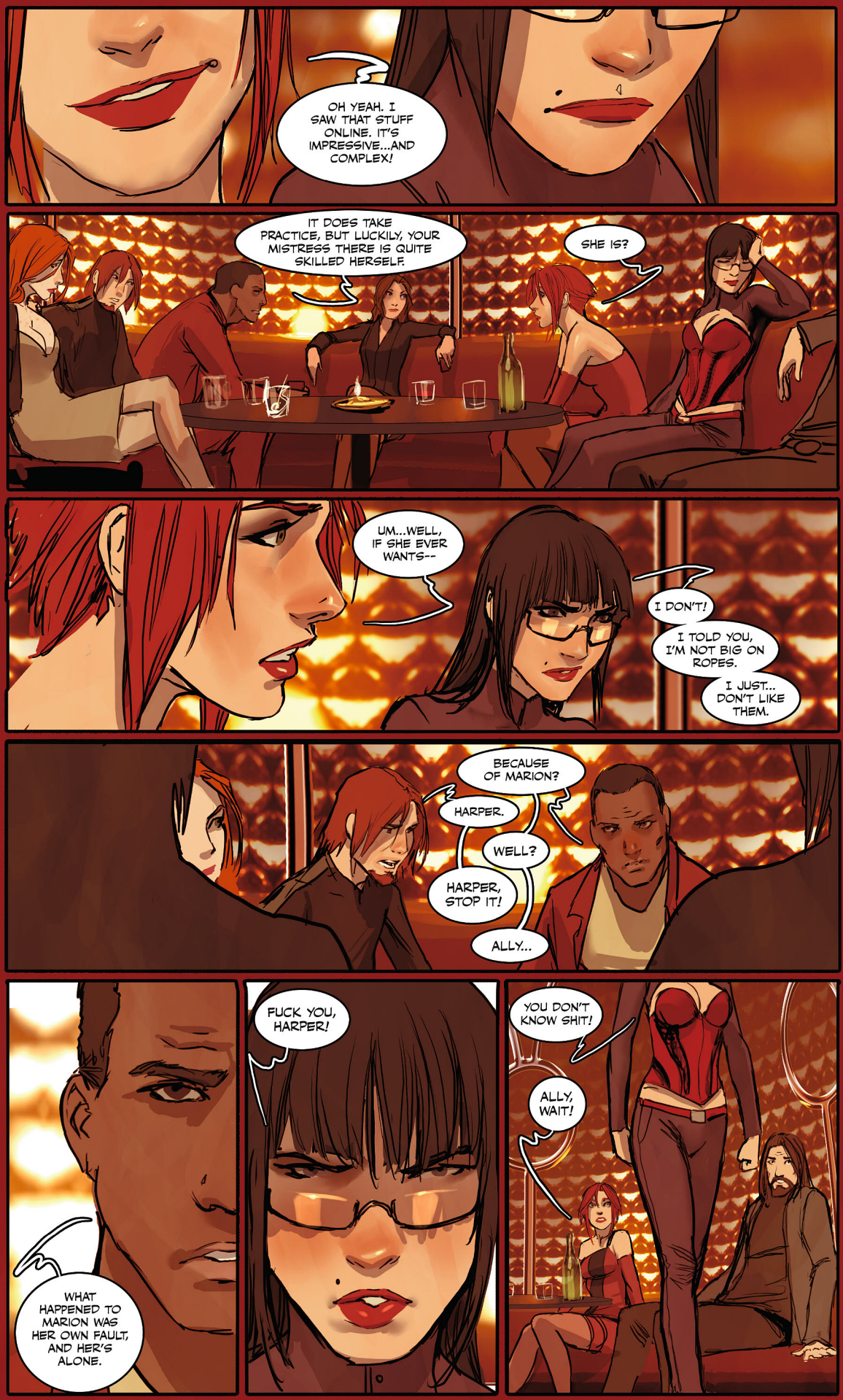

STILL, CASSIE WAS RIGHT. HARPER WAS IMPRESSIVE.
I SAW IT IN HIM...IN HIS BODY LANGUAGE.
THE SAME MOOD, SAME ATTITUDE I SAW IN ALLY...THIS AIR OF CONFIDENCE AND ALMOST ANIMALISTIC ELEGANCE.
AND WATCHING HIM, IT BECAME OBVIOUS WHY THE WOMAN ON THE STAGE WAS SO CALM. OH, AT TIMES I SAW HER TREMBLE, NOT IN FEAR, BUT IN EXCITEMENT. AND EVERY NOW AND THEN, I SAW THEM SHARE SMALL, SECRET SMILES...IRONICALLY PRIVATE, TRUSTING. I KNEW THOSE SMILES. I FOUND MYSELF SHARING THOSE SAME SMILES WITH ALLY LAST WEEKEND.
IT'S FUNNY. THERE WAS A TIME I WOULD HAVE EASILY FALLEN FOR A GUY LIKE HARPER...AND YET...ALL MY THOUGHTS WERE ON ALLY.
YUP! IT WAS TOO LATE FOR ME.
HOW ABOUT I...
UM, YEAH...SO... I GOTTA GO TO THE BATHROOM.
AND...UM... I'M TAKING TOM SO WE CAN GET SOME DRINKS. YOU GUYS WANT SOMETHING?
!!! TOTALLY NOT OFF FOR A QUICKIE!
RUM AND COKE FOR ME.
I'LL HAVE A VODKA CRANBERRY.

VODKA... CRANBERRY?
WHAT?
VODKA?
YEAH?
OKAY... GONNA BE ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS THEN?
YOU GUYS WERE AWAY FOR A WHILE.
UM...YEAH. THERE WAS... A LINE AT THE BAR.
IT SEEMS RELATIVELY EMPTY NOW.
YES, NOW, BUT IT WASN'T THEN.
UH-HUH.
YOU KNOW HOW PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT TOLERANCE LEVELS FOR ALCOHOL?
WELL...FOUR VODKA CRANBERRIES WERE ALLY'S LIMIT.

THAT'S WHAT IT TOOK TO TURN HER INTO THAT DRUNKEN FRIEND WHO *REALLY* NEEDS YOU TO KNOW SOME *SUPER IMPORTANT* STUFF!
YOU SEE ALL THAT SHTUFF THAT THEY DID THERE? ON THE STAGE?
RIGHT THERE?
THAT'S *NOTHING!*
TOTAL *NOOB* STUFF!
I COULD DO THAT TO YOU...IF I HAD, LIKE, *ZERO* IMAGINATION!
LEVEL 95!
BETTER! THAAAT'S WHAT I AM. *BETTER!*
BEEN A *WHILE,* ALLY!
UGH.
HEY, TANYA!
HEY, CASSIE! ENJOY THE SHOW?
OH, YES... IMMENSELY! I'M GUESSING YOU DID, TOO.
HEH...YEAH, YOU MIGHT SAY SO.
I *THOUGHT* I FELT SOMEONE *TRASH-TALKING* ME!
HI, *HARPER.*
OH, YES, *INTRODUCTIONS* ARE IN ORDER. LISA, THIS IS HARPER. HE OWNS THIS CLUB AND TANYA HERE IS HIS... GIRLFRIEND, ACCOUNTANT, ASSISTANT.
ANYHOO, *TANYA, HARPER,* THIS IS *LISA!* SHE IS ALLY'S...UMMM...
HER *SUB!*
I SEE...I'M VERY PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
I'M VHERRUY PHLEUSHED THO MHEET YOU-- *BLECH!*

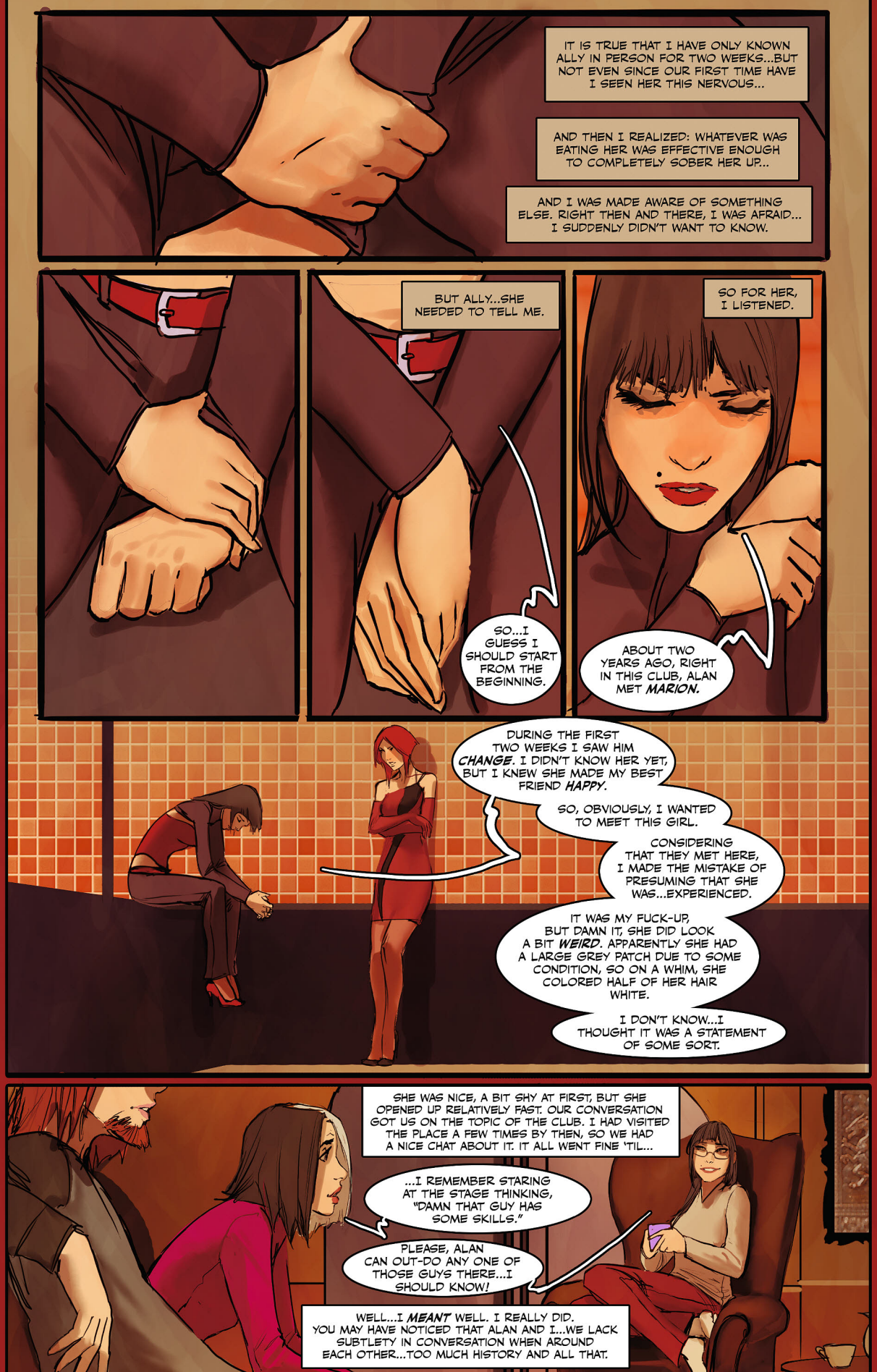

HARPER THOMAS WAS THE OWNER OF THE CRIMSON, AND THAT, OF COURSE, CAME WITH SOME PERKS. WE MOVED TO THE VIP LOUNGE.
ALAS, EVEN THIS PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT DID NOTHING FOR ALLY'S ATTITUDE. I KNEW SOMETHING WAS EATING HER UP, BUT IT WAS JUST AS OBVIOUS THAT SHE WASN'T IN THE SHARING MOOD.
SO, INSTEAD OF POKING AT THE BEEHIVE, I DECIDED TO SPEND MY TIME MORE PRODUCTIVELY. I WAS ADAMANT TO TALK TO HARPER'S SUB.
SO, WELCOME TO OUR NEWLY REMODELED VIP LOUNGE!
AS YOU CAN SEE, IT'S NOT QUITE FINISHED YET, BUT I'M EXPECTING THE DECORATIONS TO BE DONE REALLY SOON. RIGHT, ALAN?
TOTALLY ON IT!
BITE ME, ALLY!
LOOKS LIKE A CHRISTMAS TREE BLEW CHUNKS ALL OVER THIS PLACE!
WHAT WAS HER NAME? TAMMY?
TALLY?
TILLY?
SO...UM... TANYA, WAS IT?
YUP!
HELL YEAH!
AFTER SEEING YOU...ON THAT STAGE...WELL. I MEAN, YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE...COURAGE... DETERMINATION.
EMOTIONALLY STUNTED SENSE OF SHAME?
EXPERIENCE! THAT'S THE WORD I WAS AFTER. WHAT I MEAN IS, I'M KIND OF CURIOUS AS TO HOW YOU TWO GOT TO...UM, THIS?
OH...OUR'S WAS A CLASSIC TALE. BOY MEETS GIRL...
...BECAUSE BOY NEEDS AN ACCOUNTANT FOR HIS BDSM CLUB...
HILARITY ENSUES.
OKAY. THAT WAS SO TOUCHING, I'M A LITTLE BIT TEARY-EYED RIGHT NOW!
HEH!


WELL...THERE WAS FRIENDSHIP AND ROMANCE, MOST IMPORTANTLY, TRUST. WE DIDN'T JUST START OFF LIKE THIS. SOMETIMES TAKING THINGS SLOW GETS YOU FAR.
SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?
OH, MINE IS A TALE THAT STRAIGHT UP RIVALS SHAKESPEARE! STOCKPILED SEXUAL FRUSTRATION MADE ME TAKE A RISKY LEAP OF FAITH. LUCKILY, I LANDED ON ALLY! AND UNDER ALLY!
SHURE DID!
I HOPE YOU DON'T TAKE MY CURIOSITY AS PRYING INTO YOUR PERSONAL LIFE.
NO WORRIES. YOU JUST HAD A GOOD HOUR'S WORTH OF A LOOK AT MY PERSONAL LIFE BACK THERE, SO I THINK WE'RE FINE.
HEH. THING IS, I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO ACTUALLY TALK TO ANOTHER SUB. I MEAN THE INTERNET IS NICE AND ALL BUT...
OH, DROP BY HERE MORE OFTEN AND YOU'LL MEET ALL KINDS OF SUBS. FROM RELUCTANT NEW ONES, TO FULLY DEDICATED 24/7.
ARE YOU...
OH NO! NO DISRESPECT TO THOSE WHO MAKE THAT WORK, BUT I HAVE SHIT TO DO!
HELL, HARPER IS USUALLY THE FIRST TO SAY THAT SEXUALITY, THOUGH IMPORTANT, IS STILL MERELY A PART OF LIFE. IT IS NOT ALL THAT LIFE OFFERS.
AND I WHOLEHEARTEDLY AGREE WITH THAT.
AND THESE... PERFORMANCES?
JUST A BIT OF FUN. MANY OF THE PEOPLE THAT FREQUENT THE CLUB COME TO OUR CLASSES, SO WE ARE QUITE FAMILIAR.
CLASSES?
YEAH...KIND OF A BDSM SEX-ED TYPE OF THING. BASICS, PRECAUTIONS, TIPS, TRICKS, ROPE BINDING TECHNIQUES, STUFF LIKE THAT.


OH YEAH. I SAW THAT STUFF ONLINE. IT'S IMPRESSIVE...AND COMPLEX!
IT DOES TAKE PRACTICE, BUT LUCKILY, YOUR MISTRESS THERE IS QUITE SKILLED HERSELF.
SHE IS?
UM...WELL, IF SHE EVER WANTS--
I DON'T!
I TOLD YOU, I'M NOT BIG ON ROPES.
I JUST... DON'T LIKE THEM.
BECAUSE OF MARION?
HARPER.
WELL?
HARPER, STOP IT!
ALLY...
WHAT HAPPENED TO MARION WAS HER OWN FAULT, AND HER'S ALONE.
FUCK YOU, HARPER!
YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT!
ALLY, WAIT!

I'LL GO TALK--
NO, I'LL GO AFTER HER!
OKAY. JUST, TELL HER--
YEAH, YEAH!
GHK!
SNIFF.

TISSUE?
THANKS.
SNIFF.
SO ALLISON... SHE LIKED MARION?
THEY WERE BEST FRIENDS.
WHAT ABOUT YOU? ARE YOU OVER THAT WHOLE THING? HONESTLY?
IF YOU MEAN I GOT OVER MARION... I GUESS...I'M GETTING THERE.
IF YOU MEAN THE ROPE INCIDENT, WELL...
I GOT MY FAIR SHARE OF HANG-UPS ABOUT THAT NIGHT.
I THINK ALLY HAS MORE MISPLACED GUILT ABOUT THE WHOLE THING.
ALLY CARED DEEPLY ABOUT MARION...
SHE MAY HAVE BEEN ALAN'S GIRLFRIEND, AND YES, HIS SUB, BUT SHE HAD A CONNECTION TO ALLY THAT WAS JUST AS STRONG. IT WAS VISIBLE WHEN THEY TALKED...BUT IT WAS DURING MY LESSONS THAT YOU COULD REALLY SEE IT.
WAIT, ALLY ATTENDED YOUR CLASSES?
ROPE BINDING, MOSTLY. SHE WAS ALREADY PRETTY DAMN SKILLED, SO SHE USUALLY STUCK AROUND TO POKE FUN AT MARION AND ALAN. BUT THERE WAS THIS ONE TIME...
YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT IT?
SNIFF.
YES.

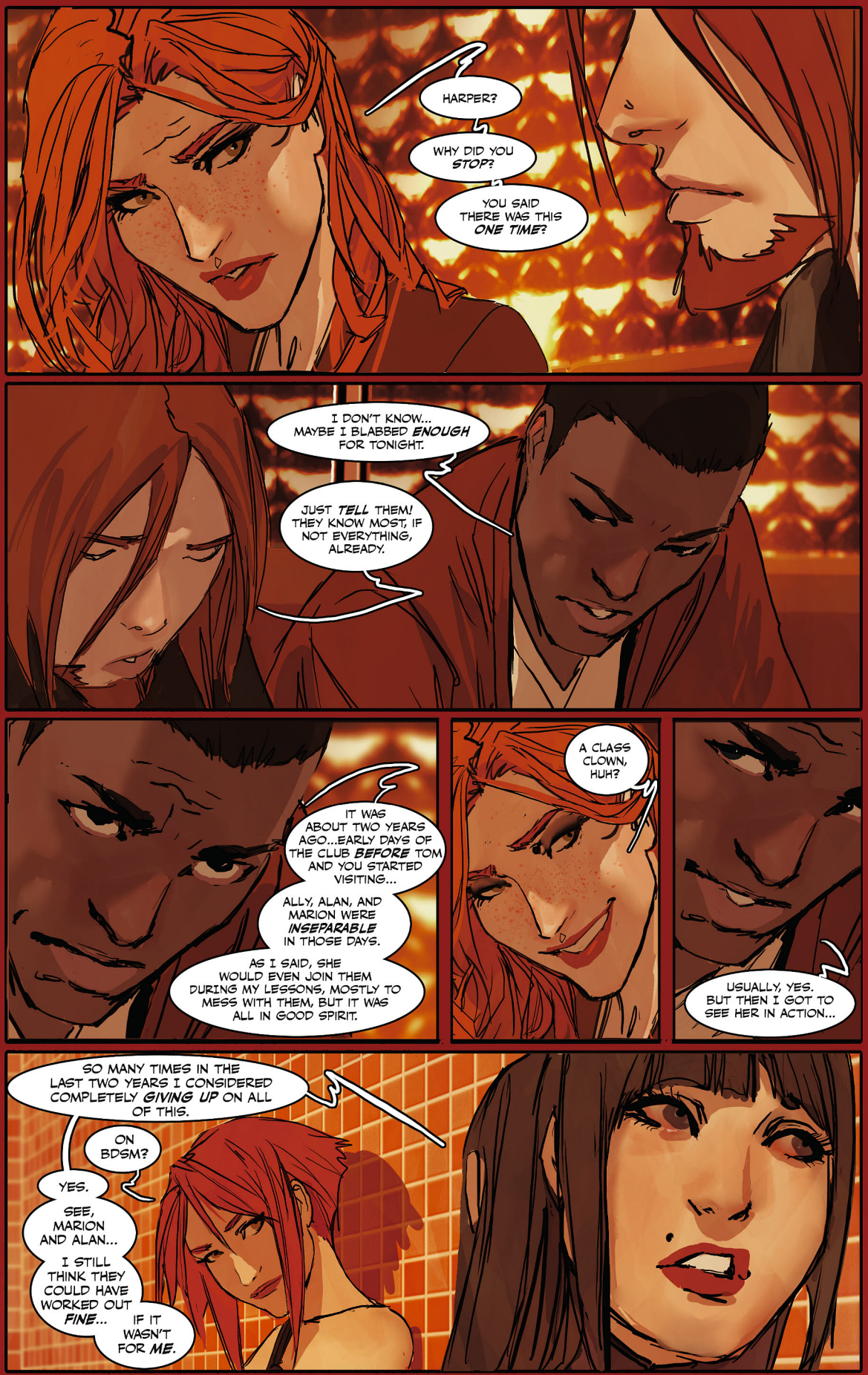

IT IS TRUE THAT I HAVE ONLY KNOWN ALLY IN PERSON FOR TWO WEEKS...BUT NOT EVEN SINCE OUR FIRST TIME HAVE I SEEN HER THIS NERVOUS...
AND THEN I REALIZED: WHATEVER WAS EATING HER WAS EFFECTIVE ENOUGH TO COMPLETELY SOBER HER UP...
AND I WAS MADE AWARE OF SOMETHING ELSE. RIGHT THEN AND THERE, I WAS AFRAID... I SUDDENLY DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW.
BUT ALLY...SHE NEEDED TO TELL ME.
SO FOR HER, I LISTENED.
SO...I GUESS I SHOULD START FROM THE BEGINNING.
ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO, RIGHT IN THIS CLUB, ALAN MET MARION.
DURING THE FIRST TWO WEEKS I SAW HIM CHANGE. I DIDN'T KNOW HER YET, BUT I KNEW SHE MADE MY BEST FRIEND HAPPY.
SO, OBVIOUSLY, I WANTED TO MEET THIS GIRL.
CONSIDERING THAT THEY MET HERE, I MADE THE MISTAKE OF PRESUMING THAT SHE WAS...EXPERIENCED.
IT WAS MY FUCK-UP, BUT DAMN IT, SHE DID LOOK A BIT WEIRD. APPARENTLY SHE HAD A LARGE GREY PATCH DUE TO SOME CONDITION, SO ON A WHIM, SHE COLORED HALF OF HER HAIR WHITE.
I DON'T KNOW...I THOUGHT IT WAS A STATEMENT OF SOME SORT.
SHE WAS NICE, A BIT SHY AT FIRST, BUT SHE OPENED UP RELATIVELY FAST. OUR CONVERSATION GOT US ON THE TOPIC OF THE CLUB. I HAD VISITED THE PLACE A FEW TIMES BY THEN, SO WE HAD A NICE CHAT ABOUT IT. IT ALL WENT FINE 'TIL...
...I REMEMBER STARING AT THE STAGE THINKING, "DAMN THAT GUY HAS SOME SKILLS."
PLEASE, ALAN CAN OUT-DO ANY ONE OF THOSE GUYS THERE...I SHOULD KNOW!
WELL...I MEANT WELL. I REALLY DID. YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED THAT ALAN AND I...WE LACK SUBTLETY IN CONVERSATION WHEN AROUND EACH OTHER...TOO MUCH HISTORY AND ALL THAT.

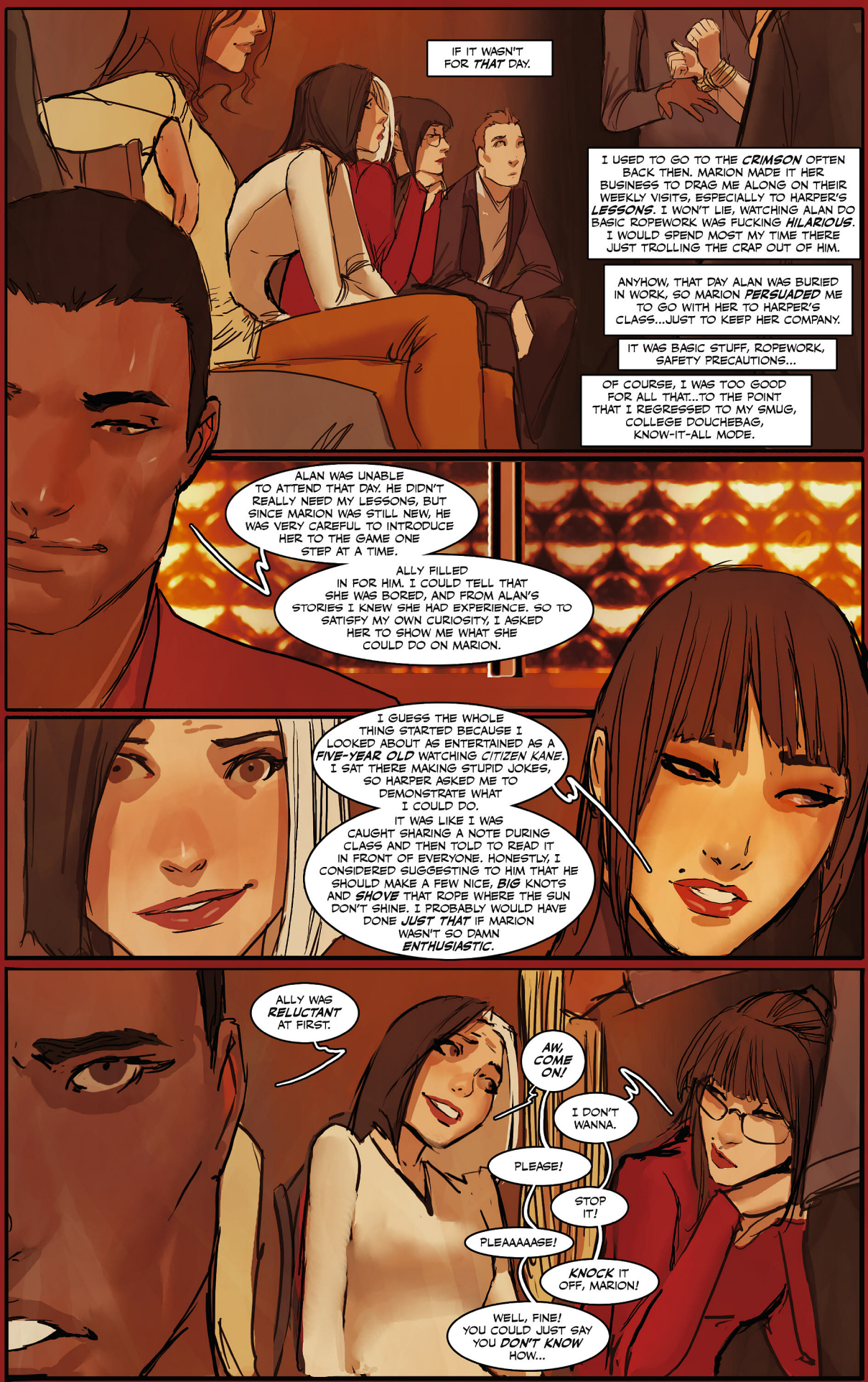
ANYHOO, I *FUCKED UP*!
WAAAAAIT A MINUTE!
LISTEN, BUDDY! JUST BECAUSE I'M A *SUB* DOESN'T MEAN I'LL JUST ROLL OVER FOR A FUCKING *THREESOME* HERE!
COME TO THINK OF IT...YOU REMIND ME OF HER A BIT.
THE *HELL* ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
SO, YEAH.
OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER COULD HAVE GONE *BETTER.*
ALAN WAS A MESS THAT WEEK. YOU SEE, MY PRESUMPTION OF HER EXPERIENCE WAS WAY OFF-BASE. MARION WAS JUST LIKE YOU, A TRUE SUB, BUT A NEWBIE.
I'M GUESSING YOU *FIXED* IT?
OH YEAH. I GOT HER TO MEET ME. WE TALKED FOR *HOURS.*

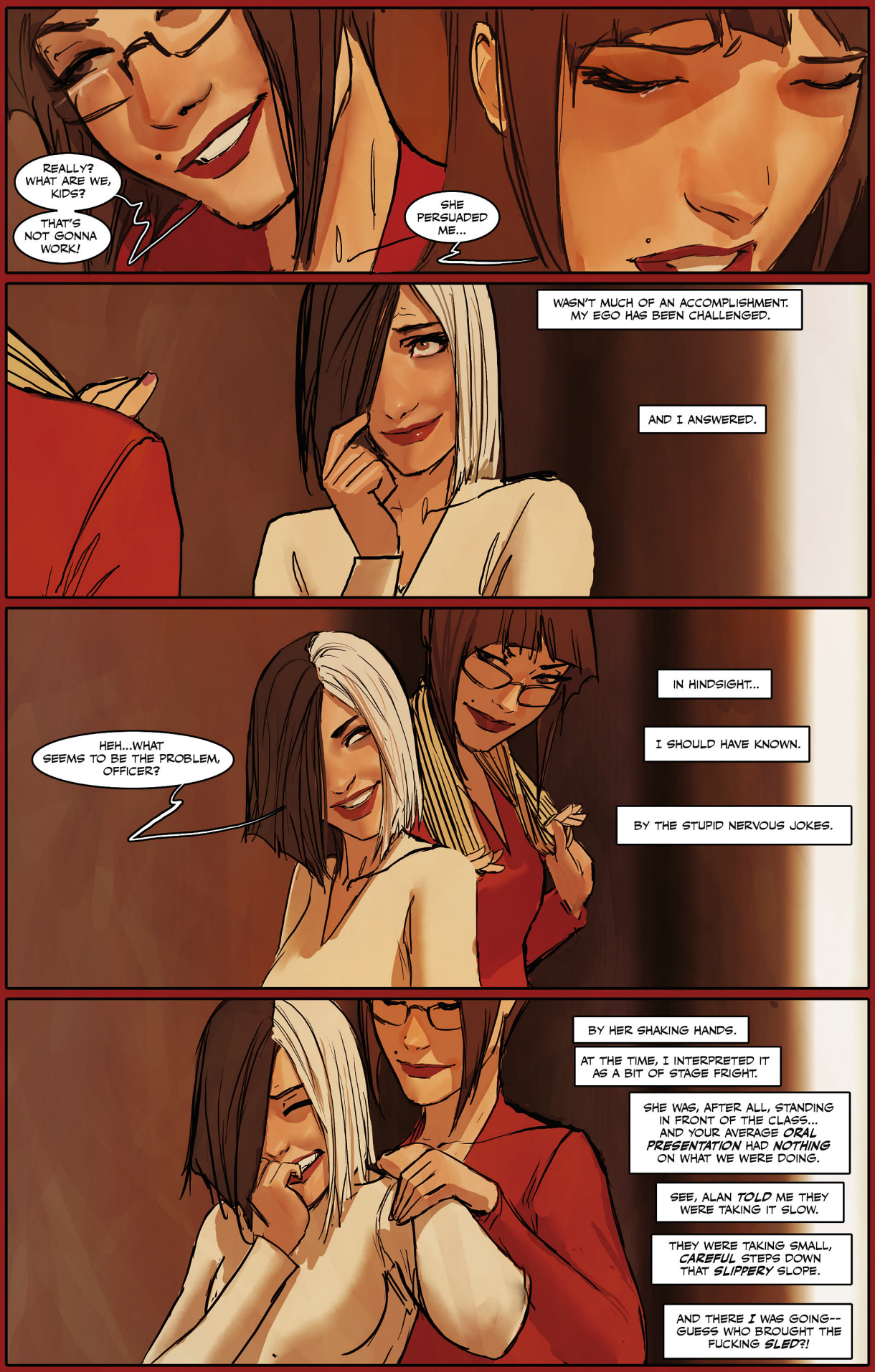
AND ONCE SHE OPENED UP, I SAW WHY ALAN LIKED HER. BEYOND THE MERE COMPATIBILITY OF SEXUAL TASTE, MARION WAS FUNNY, CLEVER, AND QUICK TO SMILE.
BACK THEN I KNEW SOME PEOPLE FROM THE CLUB, BUT I WOULDN'T GO SO FAR AS CALLING THEM FRIENDS. THEY WERE *ACQUAINTANCES* AT BEST...
MARION WAS A *FRIEND*. FOR THE FIRST TIME, I HAD A GIRL TO TALK TO, IN FRONT OF WHOM I COULD BE MYSELF.
SHE WAS *DIFFERENT* FROM ALAN. SHE LACKED HIS SPECIFIC BRAND OF TEASING DICKISHNESS.
BUT SHE REPLACED IT WITH *WARMTH*.
I KNOW HOW THAT FEELS...
NOT HAVING ANYONE WITH WHOM YOU CAN TRULY BE *YOURSELF*.

I KNOW YOU DO, LISA. LET'S FACE IT, YOUR FRUSTRATION WAS ENOUGH TO GET YOU TO MEET A *STRANGER* FROM THE INTERNET.
NO REGRETS HERE.
YEAH, SOMETIMES THINGS WORK OUT NICELY. THAT IS ONE OF THE THINGS THAT'S TEARING ME UP INSIDE. IT SEEMED TO *WORK* FOR THEM...FOR ALL OF US.
BOOOO! GET A DUNGEON!
POP
I WAS HAPPY. BOTH FOR THEM, AND FOR MYSELF.

LISA, YOU MAKE ME HAPPY. AND I DON'T WANT TO RISK ANYTHING RUINING THIS.
I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO COME HERE, TO MEET OTHER DOMS. BETTER ONES, LIKE HARPER.
I...DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU...THOUGH I MAY DESERVE IT.
I WAS STUNNED. ALLY'S WORDS MADE MY HEART BEAT FASTER...
WITH JOY?
FEAR?
HARD TO SAY REALLY.
SO, WHAT HAPPENED?
I DID WHAT I DO BEST WITH ALL MY RELATIONSHIPS. I FUCKED IT UP.

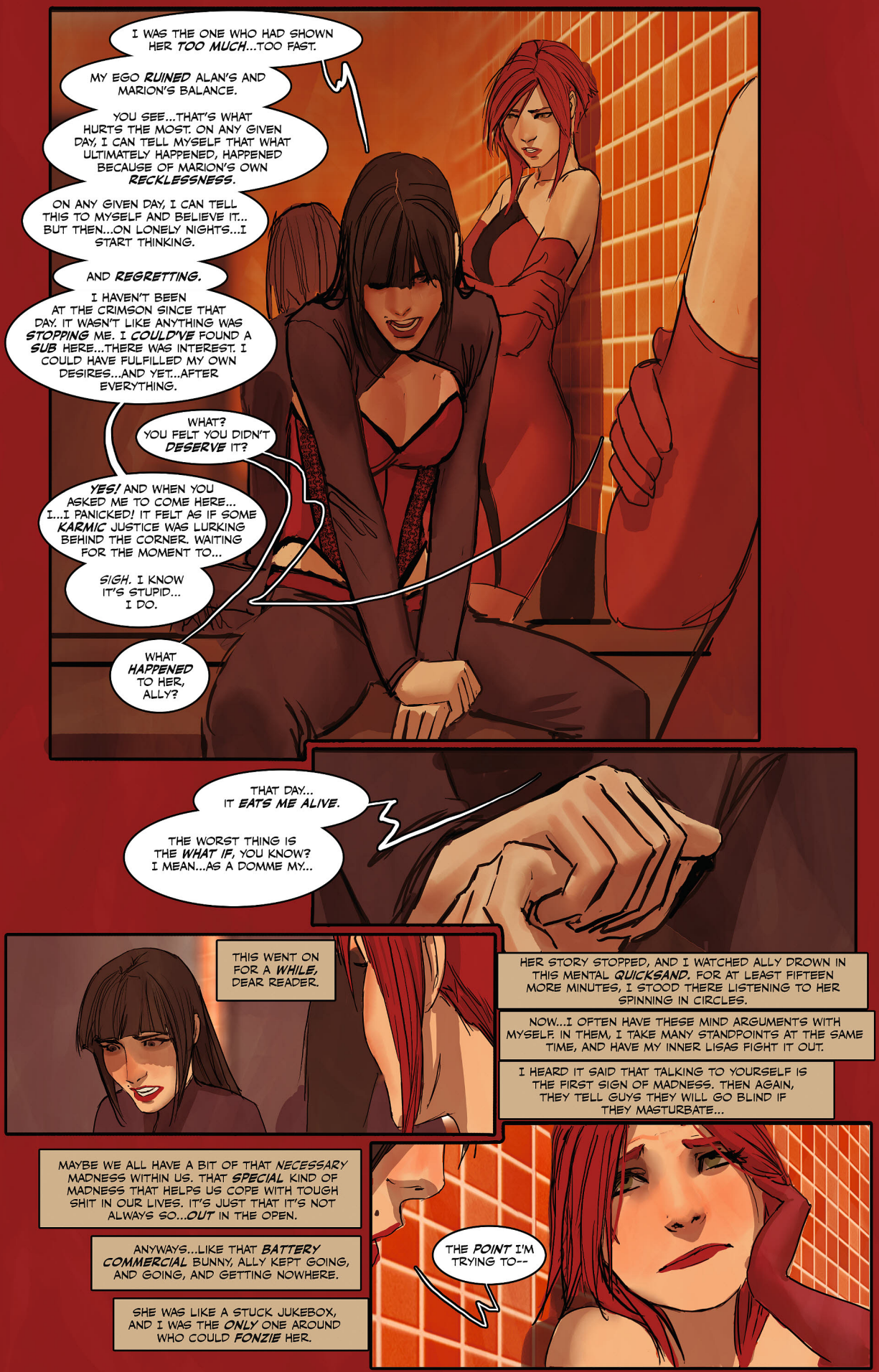

HARPER?
WHY DID YOU STOP?
YOU SAID THERE WAS THIS ONE TIME?
I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE I BLABBED ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT.
JUST TELL THEM! THEY KNOW MOST, IF NOT EVERYTHING, ALREADY.
IT WAS ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO...EARLY DAYS OF THE CLUB BEFORE TOM AND YOU STARTED VISITING...
ALLY, ALAN, AND MARION WERE INSEPARABLE IN THOSE DAYS.
AS I SAID, SHE WOULD EVEN JOIN THEM DURING MY LESSONS, MOSTLY TO MESS WITH THEM, BUT IT WAS ALL IN GOOD SPIRIT.
A CLASS CLOWN, HUH?
USUALLY, YES. BUT THEN I GOT TO SEE HER IN ACTION...
SO MANY TIMES IN THE LAST TWO YEARS I CONSIDERED COMPLETELY GIVING UP ON ALL OF THIS.
ON BDSM?
YES.
SEE, MARION AND ALAN...
I STILL THINK THEY COULD HAVE WORKED OUT FINE...
IF IT WASN'T FOR ME.

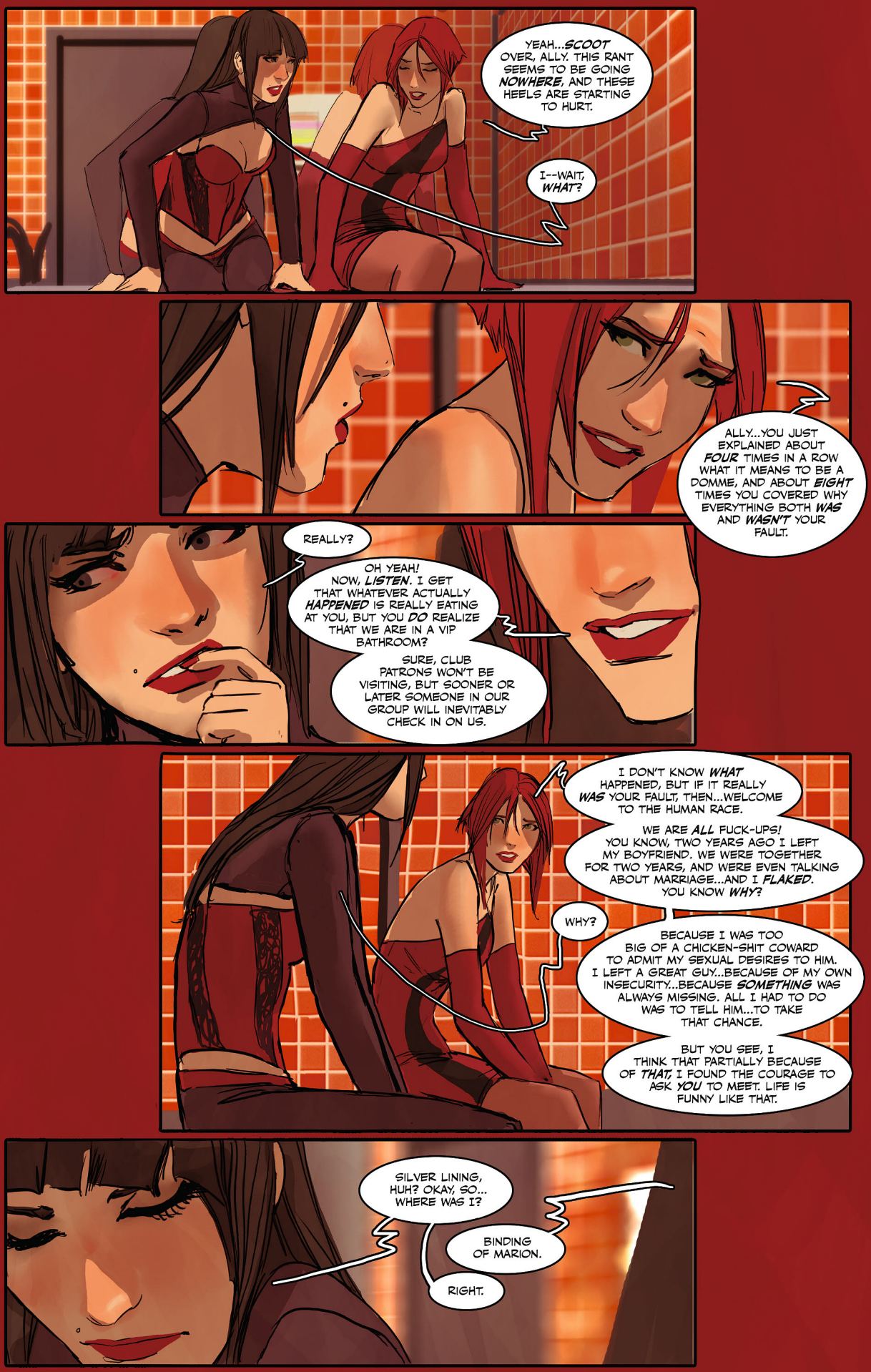

IF IT WASN'T FOR *THAT* DAY.
I USED TO GO TO THE *CRIMSON* OFTEN BACK THEN. MARION MADE IT HER BUSINESS TO DRAG ME ALONG ON THEIR WEEKLY VISITS, ESPECIALLY TO HARPER'S *LESSONS*. I WON'T LIE, WATCHING ALAN DO BASIC ROPEWORK WAS FUCKING *HILARIOUS*. I WOULD SPEND MOST MY TIME THERE JUST TROLLING THE CRAP OUT OF HIM.
ANYHOW, THAT DAY ALAN WAS BURIED IN WORK, SO MARION *PERSUADED* ME TO GO WITH HER TO HARPER'S CLASS...JUST TO KEEP HER COMPANY.
IT WAS BASIC STUFF, ROPEWORK, SAFETY PRECAUTIONS...
OF COURSE, I WAS TOO GOOD FOR ALL THAT...TO THE POINT THAT I REGRESSED TO MY SMUG, COLLEGE DOUCHEBAG, KNOW-IT-ALL MODE.
ALAN WAS UNABLE TO ATTEND THAT DAY. HE DIDN'T REALLY NEED MY LESSONS, BUT SINCE MARION WAS STILL NEW, HE WAS VERY CAREFUL TO INTRODUCE HER TO THE GAME ONE STEP AT A TIME.
ALLY FILLED IN FOR HIM. I COULD TELL THAT SHE WAS BORED, AND FROM ALAN'S STORIES I KNEW SHE HAD EXPERIENCE. SO TO SATISFY MY OWN CURIOSITY, I ASKED HER TO SHOW ME WHAT SHE COULD DO ON MARION.
I GUESS THE WHOLE THING STARTED BECAUSE I LOOKED ABOUT AS ENTERTAINED AS A *FIVE-YEAR OLD* WATCHING *CITIZEN KANE*. I SAT THERE MAKING STUPID JOKES, SO HARPER ASKED ME TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT I COULD DO.
IT WAS LIKE I WAS CAUGHT SHARING A NOTE DURING CLASS AND THEN TOLD TO READ IT IN FRONT OF EVERYONE. HONESTLY, I CONSIDERED SUGGESTING TO HIM THAT HE SHOULD MAKE A FEW NICE, *BIG* KNOTS AND *SHOVE* THAT ROPE WHERE THE SUN DON'T SHINE. I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE DONE *JUST THAT* IF MARION WASN'T SO DAMN *ENTHUSIASTIC*.
ALLY WAS *RELUCTANT* AT FIRST.
AW, COME ON!
I DON'T WANNA.
PLEASE!
STOP IT!
PLEAAAAASE!
KNOCK IT OFF, MARION!
WELL, FINE! YOU COULD JUST SAY YOU *DON'T KNOW* HOW...

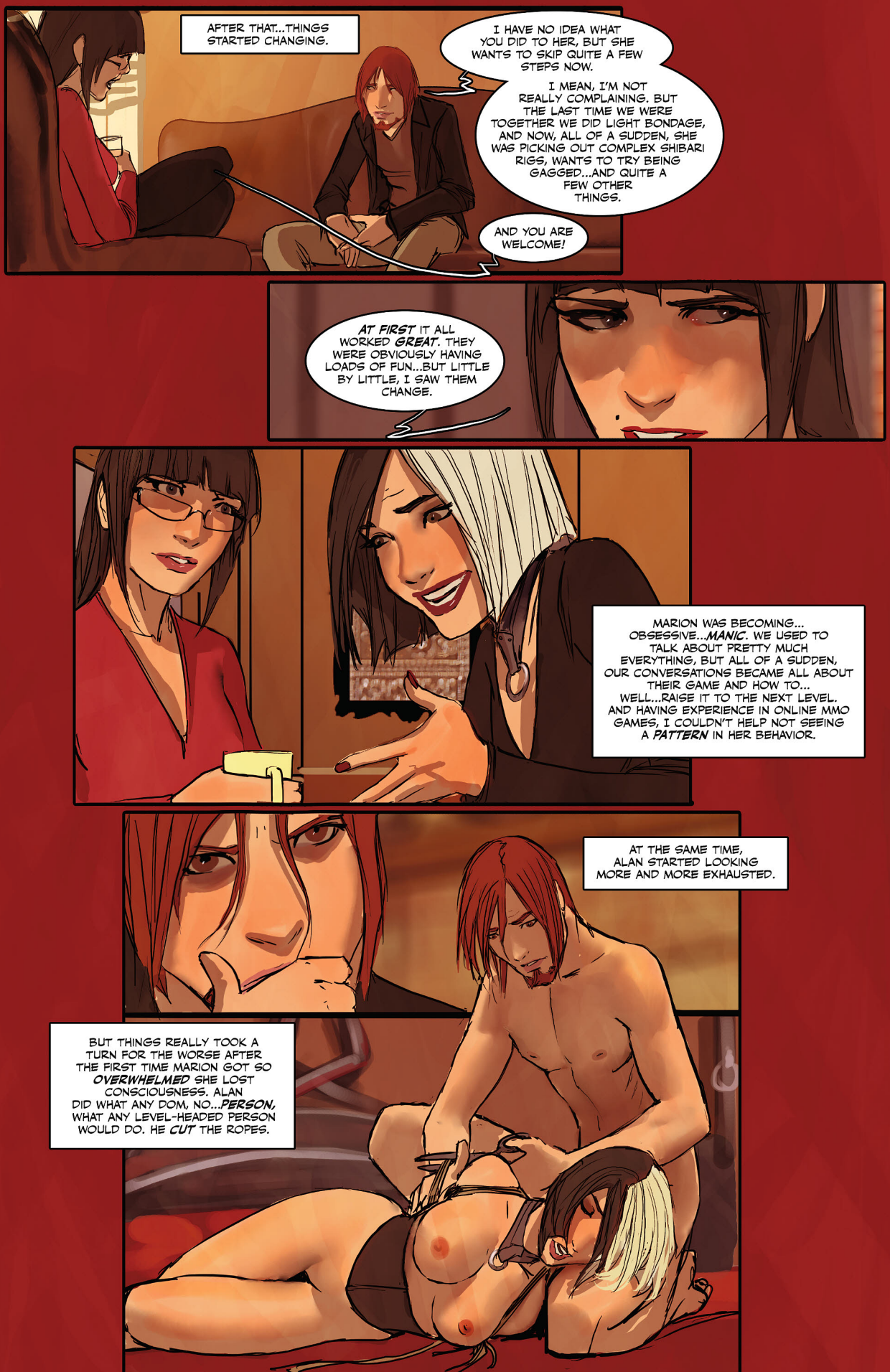

REALLY? WHAT ARE WE, KIDS?
THAT'S NOT GONNA WORK!
SHE PERSUADED ME...
WASN'T MUCH OF AN ACCOMPLISHMENT. MY EGO HAS BEEN CHALLENGED.
AND I ANSWERED.
HEH...WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM, OFFICER?
IN HINDSIGHT...
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN.
BY THE STUPID NERVOUS JOKES.
BY HER SHAKING HANDS.
AT THE TIME, I INTERPRETED IT AS A BIT OF STAGE FRIGHT.
SHE WAS, AFTER ALL, STANDING IN FRONT OF THE CLASS... AND YOUR AVERAGE ORAL PRESENTATION HAD NOTHING ON WHAT WE WERE DOING.
SEE, ALAN TOLD ME THEY WERE TAKING IT SLOW.
THEY WERE TAKING SMALL, CAREFUL STEPS DOWN THAT SLIPPERY SLOPE.
AND THERE I WAS GOING-- GUESS WHO BROUGHT THE FUCKING SLED?!

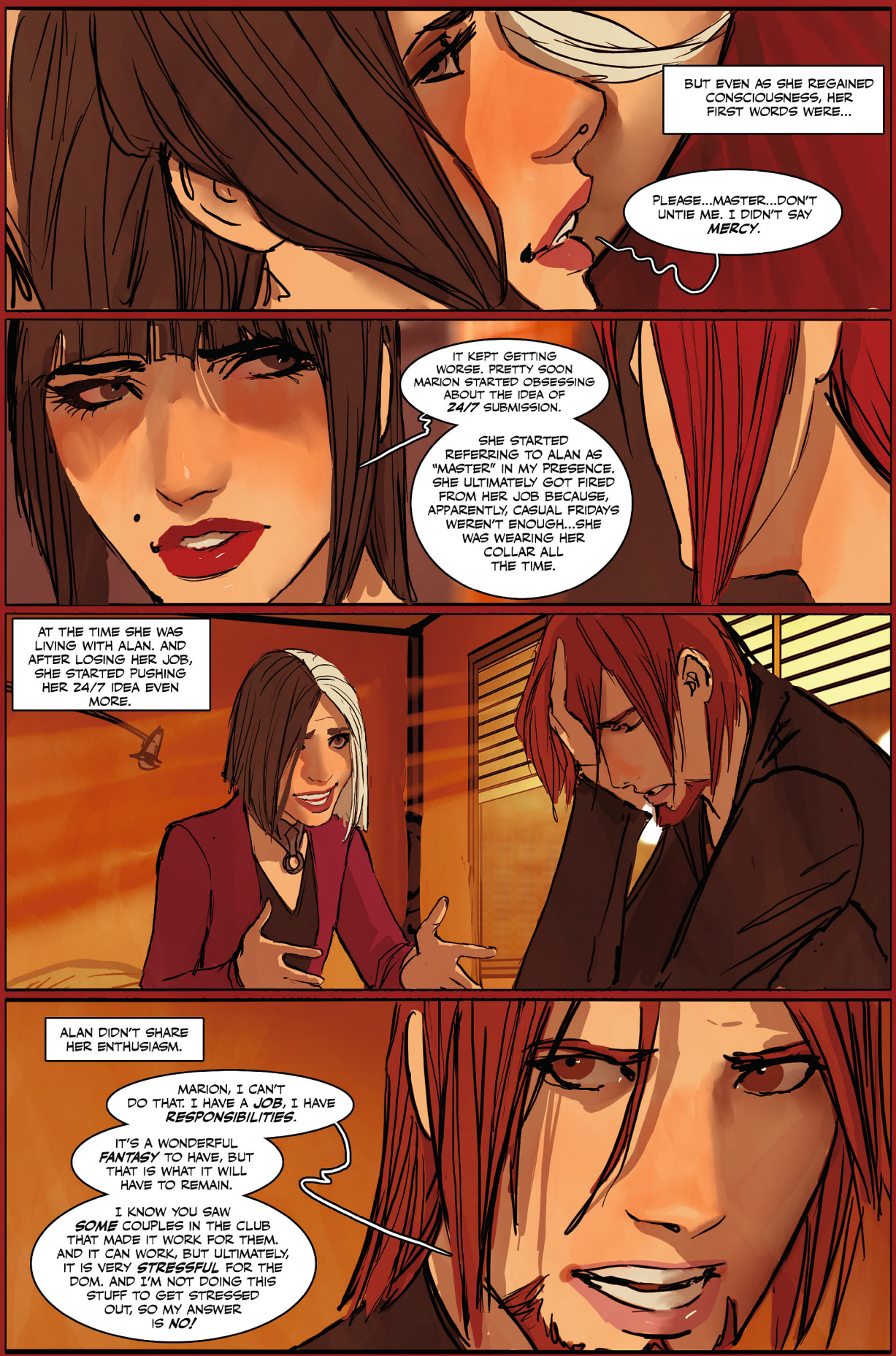
IT WAS SO EASY.
EVERYONE WAS PERFECTLY SILENT. I LISTENED TO HER BREATHING GROWING FASTER.
AND I WAS LOVING IT.
I WAS REVELLING IN MY EGO...I WAS SO, SO GOOD!
IF YOU WANT ME TO STOP, JUST SAY SUNSTONE... AND I WIN THE GAME!
SHE WAS AMAZING! HER BINDING WAS WHAT IT SHOULD BE, A RITUAL...
A DANCE...
AS SHE TOOK AWAY MARION'S FREEDOM, I COULD SEE HER SINKING INTO SUBSPACE...THAT POWERFUL, ALMOST HYPNOTIC STATE OF DEEP SUBMISSIVE RECEPTIVENESS.
I WAS ENJOYING EVERY SECOND OF IT. SHOWING OFF TO MARION...
I NEVER FOUND HER SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE, NOT BECAUSE SHE WAS A WOMAN. AS YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED, I HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH THAT. HOWEVER, IN THAT MOMENT...I COULD SEE MYSELF TAKING THE GAME TO ITS END.
I WAS SO DRUNK WITH EGO.

I NEVER SAW A SUBMISSIVE SINKING INTO SUBSPACE BEFORE...I WANTED TO SEE IT.
WITH ALAN, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE.
I COULD TELL SHE WAS SINKING, AND I WANTED TO DRAG HER DEEPER.
I SPENT SO MUCH TIME DWELLING ON THAT DAY...
KNEEL FOR ME, MARION!
YE--YES!
TRYING TO RATIONALIZE MY OWN DESIRES.
TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS WRONG WITH ME.
WHY WOULD ANYTHING BE WRONG WITH YOU?
I DON'T KNOW... I GUESS I WAS LOOKING FOR ANY EXCUSE.
I FELT LIKE I BETRAYED BOTH MY FRIENDS.
I'VE SEEN PEOPLE TRY TO RATIONALIZE THIS FETISH IN SOME WEIRD FUCKED UP WAYS.
A DOM RELEASES HIS FRUSTRATION AND RAGE OF BEING ABUSED AS A CHILD... WHO KNOWS WHAT DARK MEMORIES TORMENT THESE STRANGE PEOPLE.
A SUB MUST BE PROJECTING HIS OR HER GUILT FELT FOR LONG GONE EVENTS OF ONE'S PAST. MAYBE THE SUB FEELS UNWORTHY...THUS MANIFESTING THE DESIRE TO BE DEHUMANIZED BECAUSE MOMMY OR DADDY NEVER LOVED THEM.
IN THE END...ALL OF IT IS BULLSHIT. THERE ARE DAMAGED PEOPLE IN BDSM LIKE THERE ARE IN ANYTHING ELSE. LIFE IS FUCKED UP LIKE THAT. HOWEVER, THAT'S NOT WHY MOST OF US LIKE IT. IT'S NOT WHY I LIKE IT.
I'M A DOMME. IT'S WHAT I KNOW AND LOVE. I'M NOT A DOMME BECAUSE I'M COMPENSATING FOR SOME TRAUMA. FOR ME, THE GREATEST PLEASURE IS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE GAME AND FULFILL MY SUBMISSIVE'S DEEPEST DESIRES.
TO CLAIM MY SUB, PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY, AND FOR THAT SHORT WHILE, TO BE THEIR GUIDE IN THE DARK. ALL THEIR TRUST PLACED IN ME...IT IS AN INTENSE HIGH.
AND SO THERE I WAS. A WILLING SUBMISSIVE IN MY GRASP.
IN A WAY, I WISH I HAD SOME DARK EXCUSE, BUT I DID IT BECAUSE I WANTED TO DO IT.
I PUSHED HER INTO THE WONDERFUL, DEEP WATERS OF SUBSPACE.
SHE SUNK DEEP AND SUNK FAST.

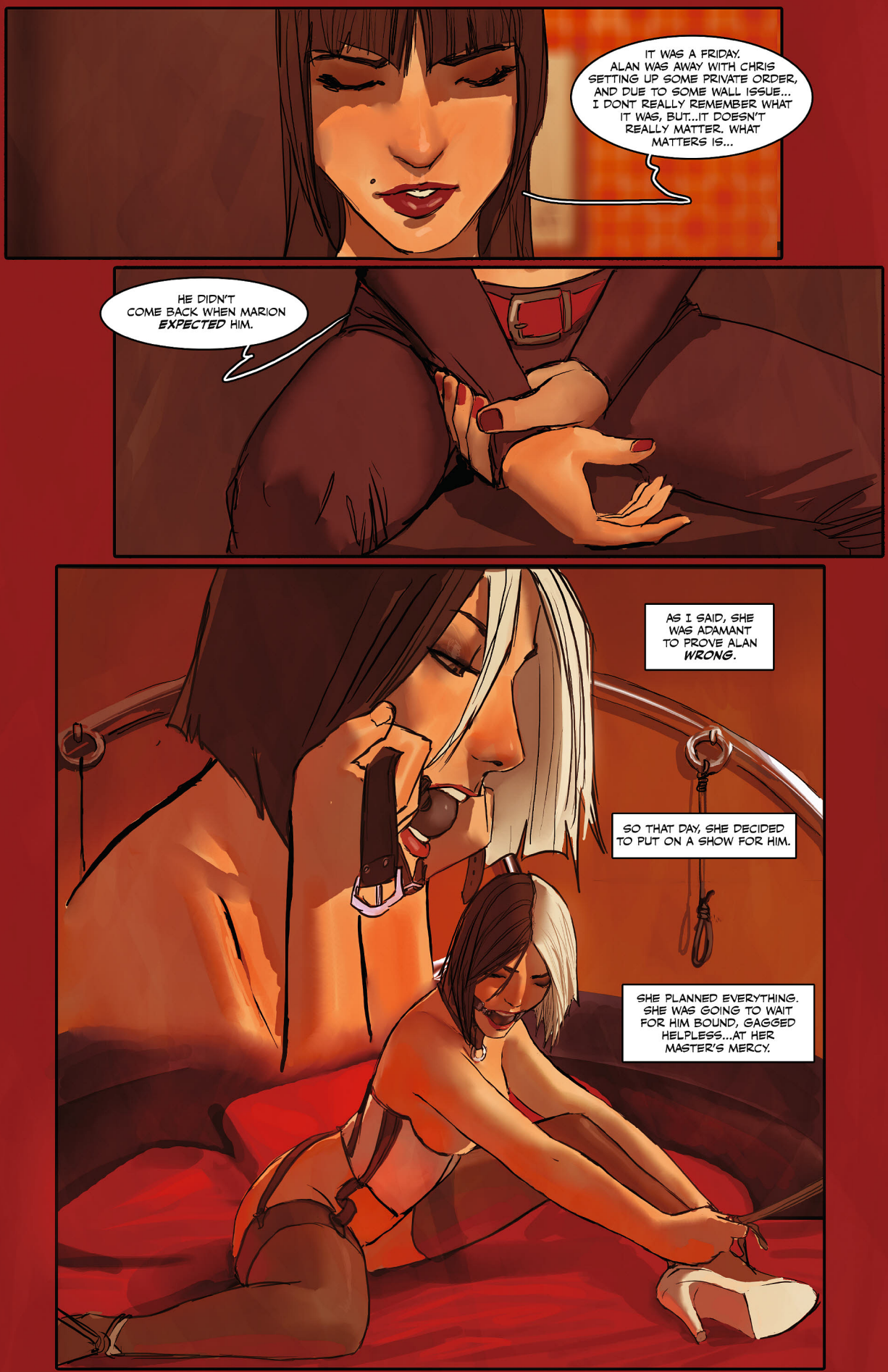

I WAS THE ONE WHO HAD SHOWN HER TOO MUCH...TOO FAST.
MY EGO RUINED ALAN'S AND MARION'S BALANCE.
YOU SEE...THAT'S WHAT HURTS THE MOST. ON ANY GIVEN DAY, I CAN TELL MYSELF THAT WHAT ULTIMATELY HAPPENED, HAPPENED BECAUSE OF MARION'S OWN RECKLESSNESS.
ON ANY GIVEN DAY, I CAN TELL THIS TO MYSELF AND BELIEVE IT... BUT THEN...ON LONELY NIGHTS...I START THINKING.
AND REGRETTING.
I HAVEN'T BEEN AT THE CRIMSON SINCE THAT DAY. IT WASN'T LIKE ANYTHING WAS STOPPING ME. I COULD'VE FOUND A SUB HERE...THERE WAS INTEREST. I COULD HAVE FULFILLED MY OWN DESIRES...AND YET...AFTER EVERYTHING.
WHAT? YOU FELT YOU DIDN'T DESERVE IT?
YES! AND WHEN YOU ASKED ME TO COME HERE... I...I PANICKED! IT FELT AS IF SOME KARMIC JUSTICE WAS LURKING BEHIND THE CORNER. WAITING FOR THE MOMENT TO...
SIGH. I KNOW IT'S STUPID... I DO.
WHAT HAPPENED TO HER, ALLY?
THAT DAY... IT EATS ME ALIVE.
THE WORST THING IS THE WHAT IF, YOU KNOW? I MEAN...AS A DOMME MY...
THIS WENT ON FOR A WHILE, DEAR READER.
HER STORY STOPPED, AND I WATCHED ALLY DROWN IN THIS MENTAL QUICKSAND. FOR AT LEAST FIFTEEN MORE MINUTES, I STOOD THERE LISTENING TO HER SPINNING IN CIRCLES.
NOW...I OFTEN HAVE THESE MIND ARGUMENTS WITH MYSELF. IN THEM, I TAKE MANY STANDPOINTS AT THE SAME TIME, AND HAVE MY INNER LISAS FIGHT IT OUT.
I HEARD IT SAID THAT TALKING TO YOURSELF IS THE FIRST SIGN OF MADNESS. THEN AGAIN, THEY TELL GUYS THEY WILL GO BLIND IF THEY MASTURBATE...
MAYBE WE ALL HAVE A BIT OF THAT NECESSARY MADNESS WITHIN US. THAT SPECIAL KIND OF MADNESS THAT HELPS US COPE WITH TOUGH SHIT IN OUR LIVES. IT'S JUST THAT IT'S NOT ALWAYS SO...OUT IN THE OPEN.
ANYWAYS...LIKE THAT BATTERY COMMERCIAL BUNNY, ALLY KEPT GOING, AND GOING, AND GETTING NOWHERE.
SHE WAS LIKE A STUCK JUKEBOX, AND I WAS THE ONLY ONE AROUND WHO COULD FONZIE HER.
THE POINT I'M TRYING TO--


YEAH...SCOOT OVER, ALLY. THIS RANT SEEMS TO BE GOING NOWHERE, AND THESE HEELS ARE STARTING TO HURT.
I--WAIT, WHAT?
ALLY...YOU JUST EXPLAINED ABOUT FOUR TIMES IN A ROW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DOMME, AND ABOUT EIGHT TIMES YOU COVERED WHY EVERYTHING BOTH WAS AND WASN'T YOUR FAULT.
REALLY?
OH YEAH! NOW, LISTEN. I GET THAT WHATEVER ACTUALLY HAPPENED IS REALLY EATING AT YOU, BUT YOU DO REALIZE THAT WE ARE IN A VIP BATHROOM?
SURE, CLUB PATRONS WON'T BE VISITING, BUT SOONER OR LATER SOMEONE IN OUR GROUP WILL INEVITABLY CHECK IN ON US.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, BUT IF IT REALLY WAS YOUR FAULT, THEN...WELCOME TO THE HUMAN RACE.
WE ARE ALL FUCK-UPS! YOU KNOW, TWO YEARS AGO I LEFT MY BOYFRIEND. WE WERE TOGETHER FOR TWO YEARS, AND WERE EVEN TALKING ABOUT MARRIAGE...AND I FLAKED. YOU KNOW WHY?
WHY?
BECAUSE I WAS TOO BIG OF A CHICKEN-SHIT COWARD TO ADMIT MY SEXUAL DESIRES TO HIM. I LEFT A GREAT GUY...BECAUSE OF MY OWN INSECURITY...BECAUSE SOMETHING WAS ALWAYS MISSING. ALL I HAD TO DO WAS TO TELL HIM...TO TAKE THAT CHANCE.
BUT YOU SEE, I THINK THAT PARTIALLY BECAUSE OF THAT, I FOUND THE COURAGE TO ASK YOU TO MEET. LIFE IS FUNNY LIKE THAT.
SILVER LINING, HUH? OKAY, SO... WHERE WAS I?
BINDING OF MARION.
RIGHT.

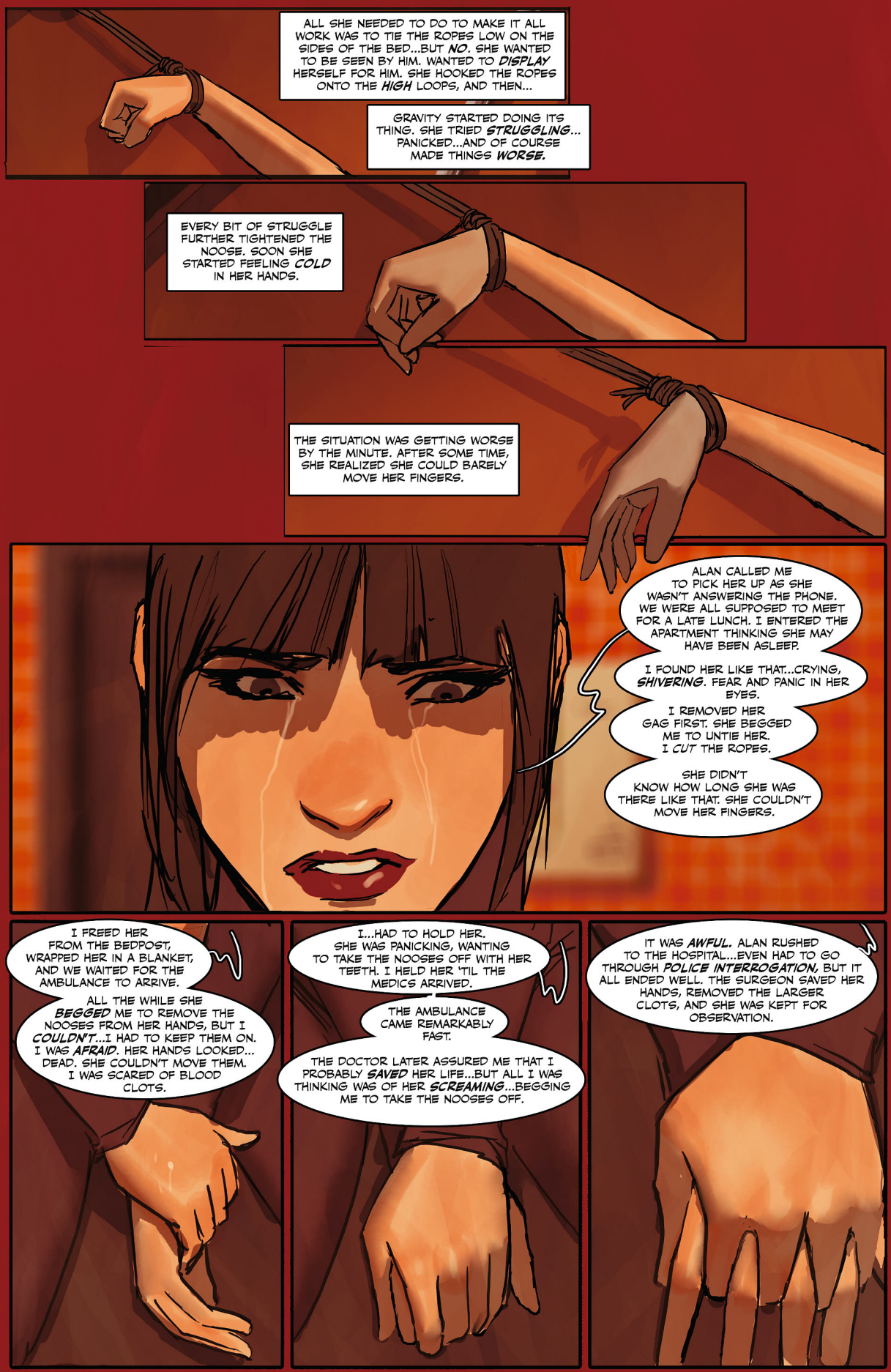

AFTER THAT...THINGS STARTED CHANGING.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU DID TO HER, BUT SHE WANTS TO SKIP QUITE A FEW STEPS NOW.
I MEAN, I'M NOT REALLY COMPLAINING. BUT THE LAST TIME WE WERE TOGETHER WE DID LIGHT BONDAGE, AND NOW, ALL OF A SUDDEN, SHE WAS PICKING OUT COMPLEX SHIBARI RIGS, WANTS TO TRY BEING GAGGED...AND QUITE A FEW OTHER THINGS.
AND YOU ARE WELCOME!
AT FIRST IT ALL WORKED GREAT. THEY WERE OBVIOUSLY HAVING LOADS OF FUN...BUT LITTLE BY LITTLE, I SAW THEM CHANGE.
MARION WAS BECOMING... OBSESSIVE...MANIC. WE USED TO TALK ABOUT PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING, BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN, OUR CONVERSATIONS BECAME ALL ABOUT THEIR GAME AND HOW TO... WELL...RAISE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL. AND HAVING EXPERIENCE IN ONLINE MMO GAMES, I COULDN'T HELP NOT SEEING A PATTERN IN HER BEHAVIOR.
AT THE SAME TIME, ALAN STARTED LOOKING MORE AND MORE EXHAUSTED.
BUT THINGS REALLY TOOK A TURN FOR THE WORSE AFTER THE FIRST TIME MARION GOT SO OVERWHELMED SHE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS. ALAN DID WHAT ANY DOM, NO...PERSON, WHAT ANY LEVEL-HEADED PERSON WOULD DO. HE CUT THE ROPES.

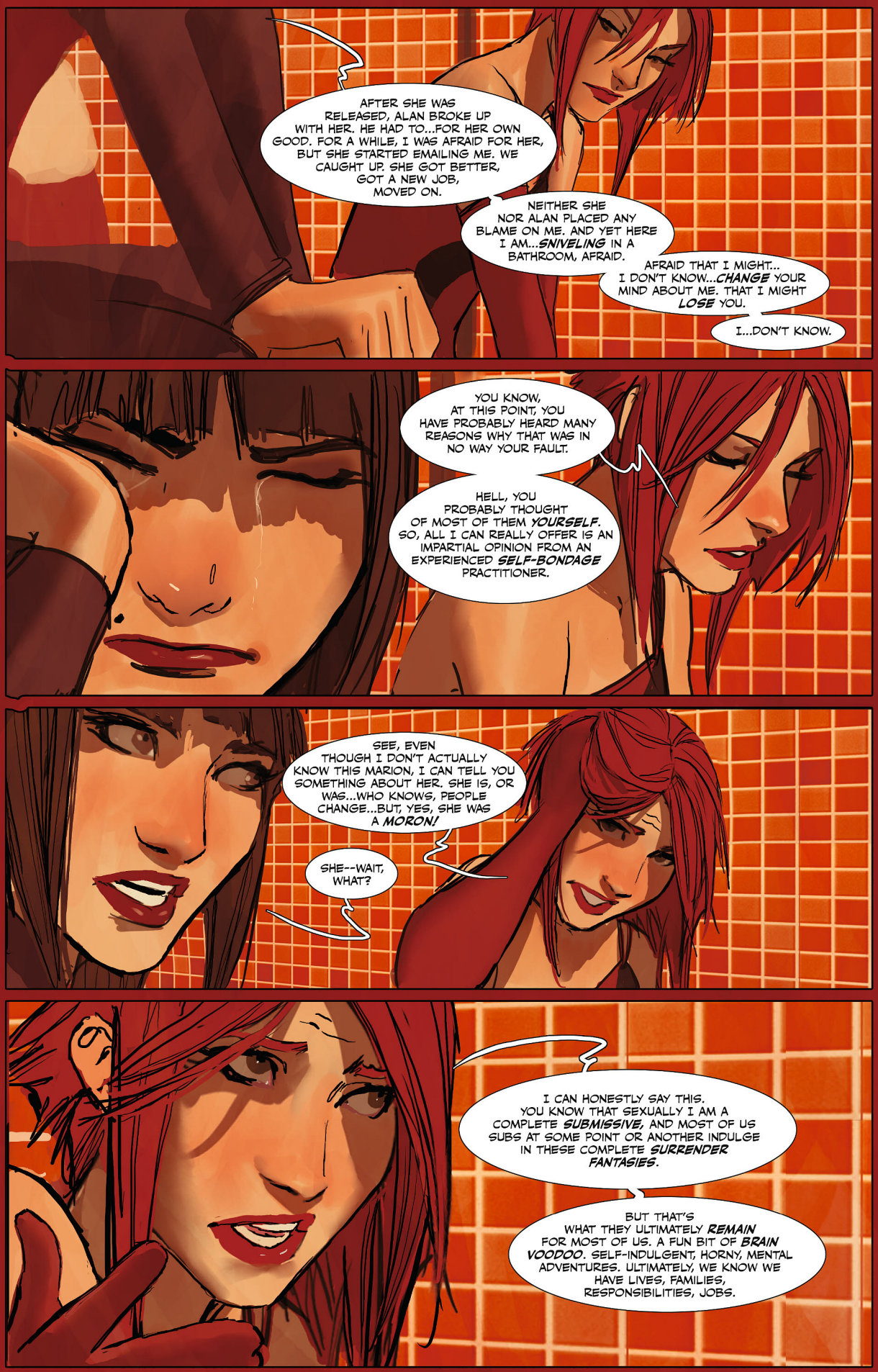

BUT EVEN AS SHE REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS, HER FIRST WORDS WERE...
PLEASE...MASTER...DON'T UNTIE ME. I DIDN'T SAY *MERCY*.
IT KEPT GETTING WORSE. PRETTY SOON MARION STARTED OBSESSING ABOUT THE IDEA OF *24/7* SUBMISSION.
SHE STARTED REFERRING TO ALAN AS "MASTER" IN MY PRESENCE. SHE ULTIMATELY GOT FIRED FROM HER JOB BECAUSE, APPARENTLY, CASUAL FRIDAYS WEREN'T ENOUGH...SHE WAS WEARING HER COLLAR ALL THE TIME.
AT THE TIME SHE WAS LIVING WITH ALAN. AND AFTER LOSING HER JOB, SHE STARTED PUSHING HER 24/7 IDEA EVEN MORE.
ALAN DIDN'T SHARE HER ENTHUSIASM.
MARION, I CAN'T DO THAT. I HAVE A *JOB*, I HAVE *RESPONSIBILITIES*.
IT'S A WONDERFUL *FANTASY* TO HAVE, BUT THAT IS WHAT IT WILL HAVE TO REMAIN.
I KNOW YOU SAW *SOME* COUPLES IN THE CLUB THAT MADE IT WORK FOR THEM. AND IT CAN WORK, BUT ULTIMATELY, IT IS VERY *STRESSFUL* FOR THE DOM. AND I'M NOT DOING THIS STUFF TO GET STRESSED OUT, SO MY ANSWER IS *NO!*

UNFORTUNATELY, OBSESSION OFTEN TRUMPS COMMON SENSE.
MARION BECAME ADAMANT TO PROVE ALAN WRONG.
AND THAT WAS WHEN IT ALL WENT WRONG.


IT WAS A FRIDAY. ALAN WAS AWAY WITH CHRIS SETTING UP SOME PRIVATE ORDER, AND DUE TO SOME WALL ISSUE... I DONT REALLY REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS, BUT...IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER. WHAT MATTERS IS...
HE DIDN'T COME BACK WHEN MARION *EXPECTED* HIM.
AS I SAID, SHE WAS ADAMANT TO PROVE ALAN *WRONG*.
SO THAT DAY, SHE DECIDED TO PUT ON A SHOW FOR HIM.
SHE PLANNED EVERYTHING. SHE WAS GOING TO WAIT FOR HIM BOUND, GAGGED HELPLESS...AT HER MASTER'S MERCY.

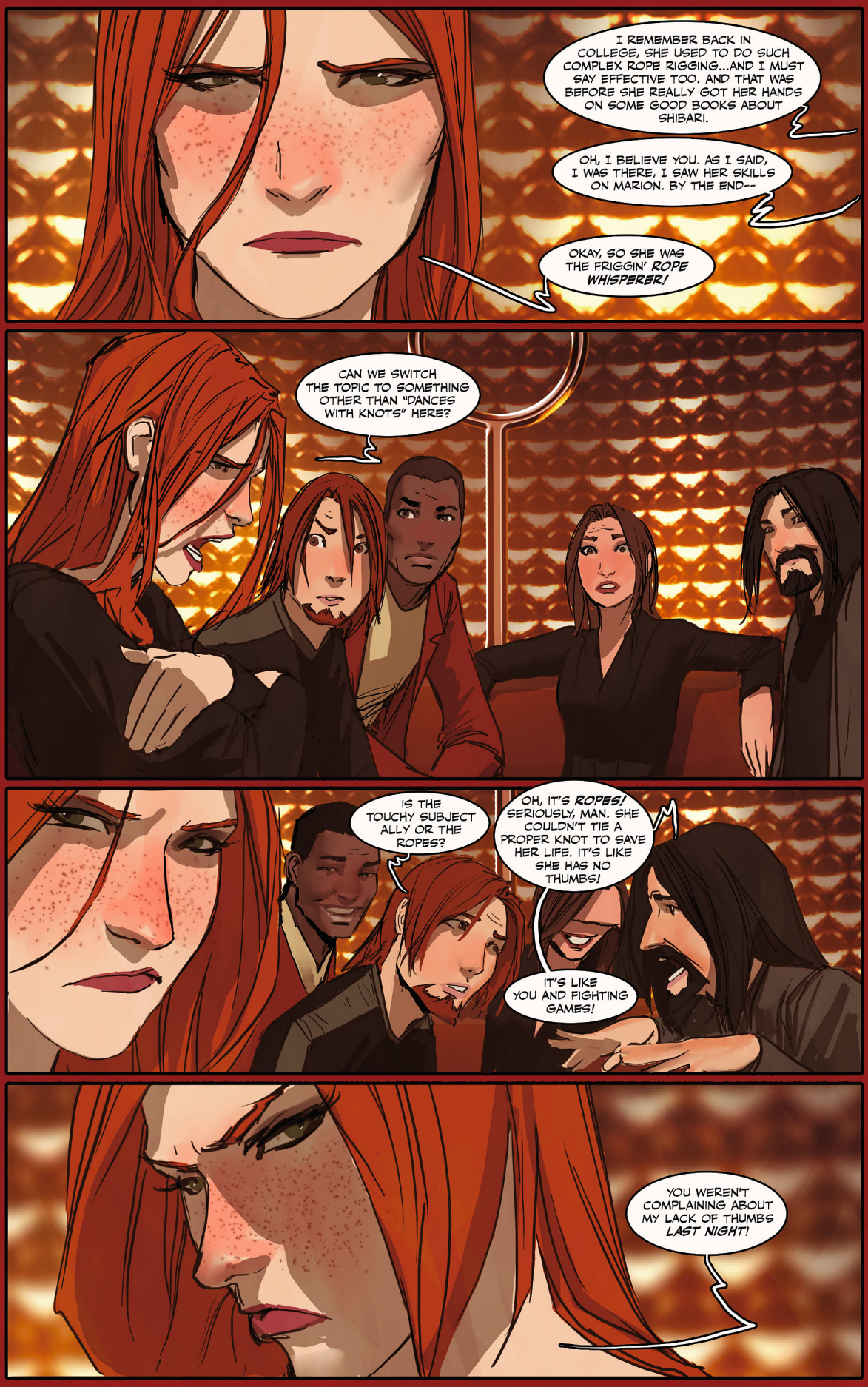
HONESTLY, IT COULD HAVE WORKED IF SHE WASN'T SO *OBSESSED* WITH MAKING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION.
SHE REALLY WANTED TO MAKE HER OWN BONDS ***INESCAPABLE***.
SHE WANTED HER ***FREEDOM*** TO BE IN ***HIS*** HANDS.
SO SHE USED SLIDING NOOSE BINDING.
A SIMPLE ***TUG***...AND HER BONDS WERE IN PLACE.
AT THE HOSPITAL SHE TOLD ME...IT WAS A MERE MINUTE LATER THAT SHE BECAME AWARE OF THE ***STUPIDITY*** OF HER IDEA.


ALL SHE NEEDED TO DO TO MAKE IT ALL WORK WAS TO TIE THE ROPES LOW ON THE SIDES OF THE BED...BUT NO. SHE WANTED TO BE SEEN BY HIM. WANTED TO DISPLAY HERSELF FOR HIM. SHE HOOKED THE ROPES ONTO THE HIGH LOOPS, AND THEN...
GRAVITY STARTED DOING ITS THING. SHE TRIED STRUGGLING... PANICKED...AND OF COURSE MADE THINGS WORSE.
EVERY BIT OF STRUGGLE FURTHER TIGHTENED THE NOOSE. SOON SHE STARTED FEELING COLD IN HER HANDS.
THE SITUATION WAS GETTING WORSE BY THE MINUTE. AFTER SOME TIME, SHE REALIZED SHE COULD BARELY MOVE HER FINGERS.
ALAN CALLED ME TO PICK HER UP AS SHE WASN'T ANSWERING THE PHONE. WE WERE ALL SUPPOSED TO MEET FOR A LATE LUNCH. I ENTERED THE APARTMENT THINKING SHE MAY HAVE BEEN ASLEEP.
I FOUND HER LIKE THAT...CRYING, SHIVERING. FEAR AND PANIC IN HER EYES.
I REMOVED HER GAG FIRST. SHE BEGGED ME TO UNTIE HER. I CUT THE ROPES.
SHE DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG SHE WAS THERE LIKE THAT. SHE COULDN'T MOVE HER FINGERS.
I FREED HER FROM THE BEDPOST, WRAPPED HER IN A BLANKET, AND WE WAITED FOR THE AMBULANCE TO ARRIVE.
ALL THE WHILE SHE BEGGED ME TO REMOVE THE NOOSES FROM HER HANDS, BUT I COULDN'T...I HAD TO KEEP THEM ON. I WAS AFRAID. HER HANDS LOOKED... DEAD. SHE COULDN'T MOVE THEM. I WAS SCARED OF BLOOD CLOTS.
I...HAD TO HOLD HER. SHE WAS PANICKING, WANTING TO TAKE THE NOOSES OFF WITH HER TEETH. I HELD HER 'TIL THE MEDICS ARRIVED.
THE AMBULANCE CAME REMARKABLY FAST.
THE DOCTOR LATER ASSURED ME THAT I PROBABLY SAVED HER LIFE...BUT ALL I WAS THINKING WAS OF HER SCREAMING...BEGGING ME TO TAKE THE NOOSES OFF.
IT WAS AWFUL. ALAN RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL...EVEN HAD TO GO THROUGH POLICE INTERROGATION, BUT IT ALL ENDED WELL. THE SURGEON SAVED HER HANDS, REMOVED THE LARGER CLOTS, AND SHE WAS KEPT FOR OBSERVATION.

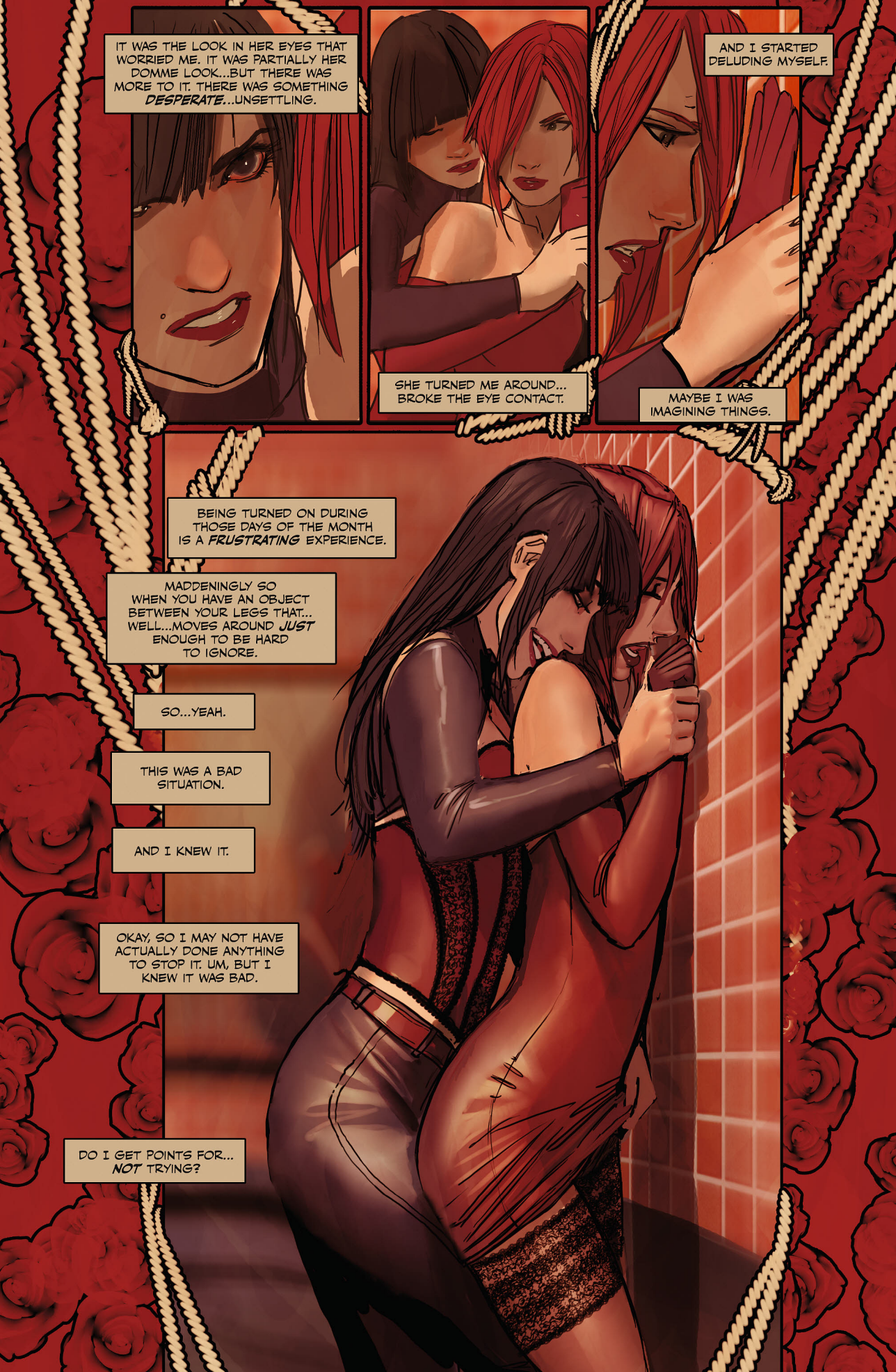

AFTER SHE WAS RELEASED, ALAN BROKE UP WITH HER. HE HAD TO...FOR HER OWN GOOD. FOR A WHILE, I WAS AFRAID FOR HER, BUT SHE STARTED EMAILING ME. WE CAUGHT UP. SHE GOT BETTER, GOT A NEW JOB, MOVED ON.
NEITHER SHE NOR ALAN PLACED ANY BLAME ON ME. AND YET HERE I AM...SNIVELING IN A BATHROOM, AFRAID.
AFRAID THAT I MIGHT... I DON'T KNOW...CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT ME. THAT I MIGHT LOSE YOU.
I...DON'T KNOW.
YOU KNOW, AT THIS POINT, YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD MANY REASONS WHY THAT WAS IN NO WAY YOUR FAULT.
HELL, YOU PROBABLY THOUGHT OF MOST OF THEM YOURSELF. SO, ALL I CAN REALLY OFFER IS AN IMPARTIAL OPINION FROM AN EXPERIENCED SELF-BONDAGE PRACTITIONER.
SEE, EVEN THOUGH I DON'T ACTUALLY KNOW THIS MARION, I CAN TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT HER. SHE IS, OR WAS...WHO KNOWS, PEOPLE CHANGE...BUT, YES, SHE WAS A MORON!
SHE--WAIT, WHAT?
I CAN HONESTLY SAY THIS. YOU KNOW THAT SEXUALLY I AM A COMPLETE SUBMISSIVE, AND MOST OF US SUBS AT SOME POINT OR ANOTHER INDULGE IN THESE COMPLETE SURRENDER FANTASIES.
BUT THAT'S WHAT THEY ULTIMATELY REMAIN FOR MOST OF US. A FUN BIT OF BRAIN VOODOO. SELF-INDULGENT, HORNY, MENTAL ADVENTURES. ULTIMATELY, WE KNOW WE HAVE LIVES, FAMILIES, RESPONSIBILITIES, JOBS.

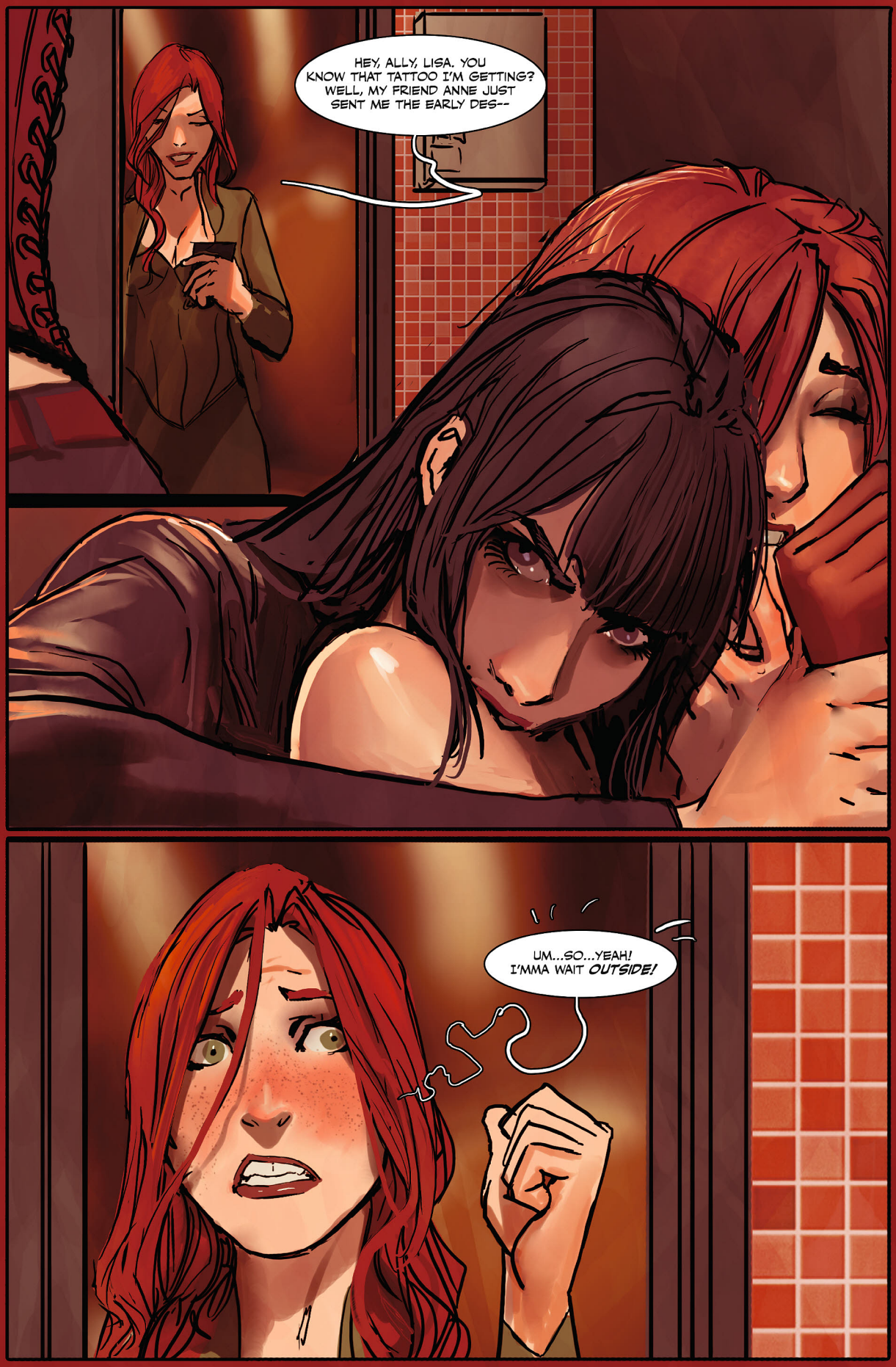
THIS BIT OF COMMON SENSE IS WHAT GETS US SELF-BONDAGE ENTHUSIASTS THROUGH THE DAY! WE ALWAYS KEEP THE GOLDEN RULE IN MIND: ALWAYS HAVE A PLAN B!
SEE, IN THE END, IT ALL COMES DOWN TO PERSONALITY.
SOME PEOPLE WILL TAKE THINGS TOO FAR... AND THEN...THINGS BACKFIRE.
YOU KNOW, EVER SINCE THAT DAY, I...I DON'T KNOW. ROPES JUST KIND OF SKEEVE ME OUT. IT'S THE WAY THEY BITE INTO THE SKIN. IT JUST REMINDS ME...
I MEAN...
I...I CAN STILL USE ROPES, BUT--
WHY DID YOU USE THEM OUR FIRST NIGHT THEN?
I DON'T KNOW.
BECAUSE YOU LIKED TO USE ROPES IN YOUR STORIES.
BECAUSE I WANTED TO TEST MYSELF.
BECAUSE I WANTED TO--
PUNISH YOURSELF?
SIGH.
OKAY, DUMBASS. TIME FOR SOME BDSM 101!
IN BDSM, THE SUBMISSIVE HAS A FAILSAFE MECHANISM, A CONTROL SWITCH. HELL, ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I LEARNED ABOUT YOU SINCE WE STARTED CHATTING ONLINE WAS THAT YOUR SAFEWORD IS SUNSTONE. THE DAMN THING IS YOUR FORUM SIGNATURE.
HEH...YEAH!
AND THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT.
SUNSTONE IS OUR BOND OF TRUST.
THAT WORD SYMBOLIZES ALL MY TRUST IN YOU. WITH IT, I CAN CONTROL, SLOW DOWN, OR STOP THE GAME IF I WANT TO.
THAT IS MY MECHANISM OF CONTROL. MARION LET GO OF THAT CONTROL. SHE PAID THE PRICE FOR IT. BUT NEVER FORGET, ALLY...

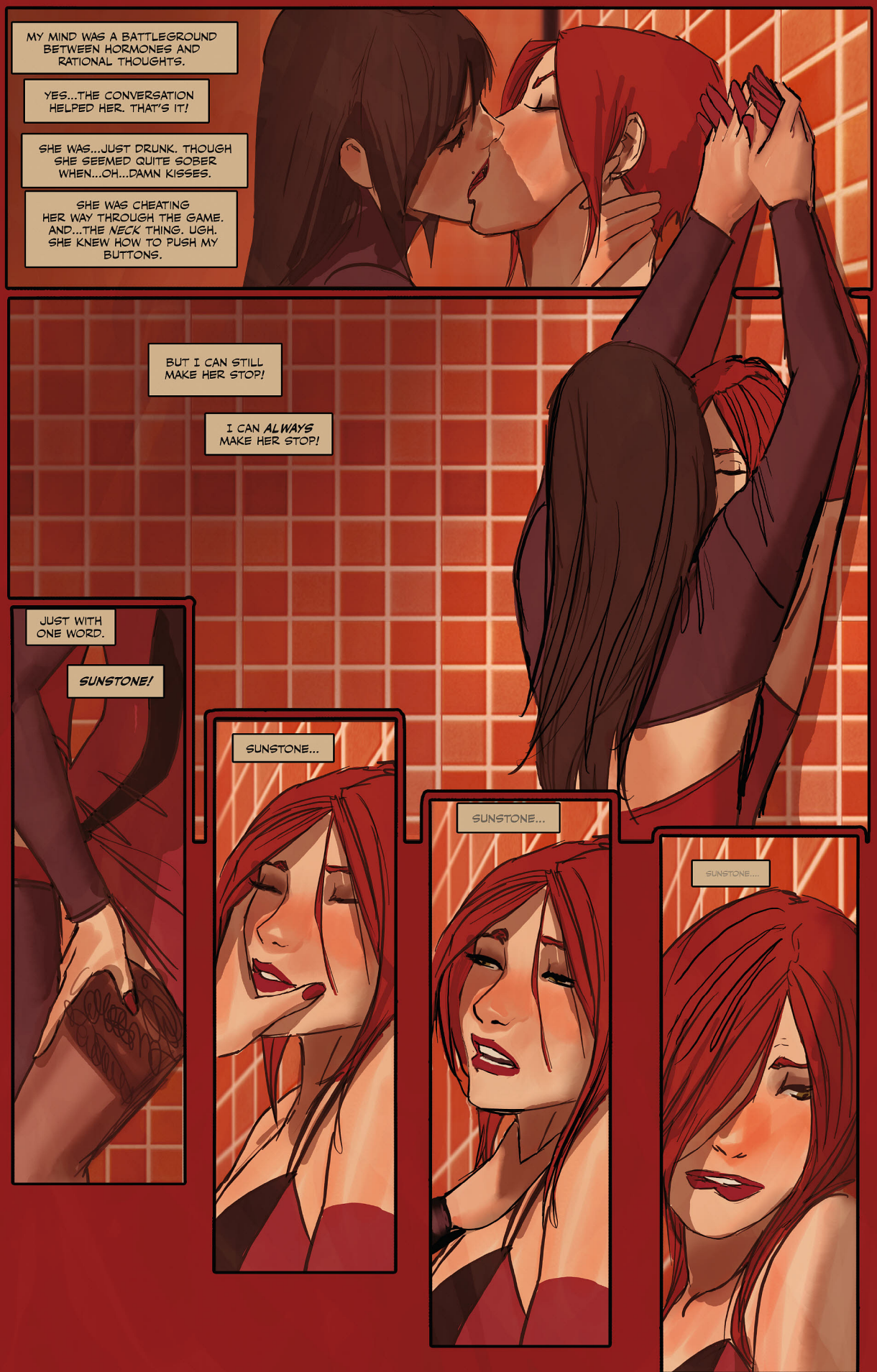
I AM NOT LIKE HER! I WILL STOP YOU.
PROVE IT THEN!
WH--WHAT?
STOP ME!


I REMEMBER BACK IN COLLEGE, SHE USED TO DO SUCH COMPLEX ROPE RIGGING...AND I MUST SAY EFFECTIVE TOO. AND THAT WAS BEFORE SHE REALLY GOT HER HANDS ON SOME GOOD BOOKS ABOUT SHIBARI.
OH, I BELIEVE YOU. AS I SAID, I WAS THERE, I SAW HER SKILLS ON MARION. BY THE END--
OKAY, SO SHE WAS THE FRIGGIN' ROPE WHISPERER!
CAN WE SWITCH THE TOPIC TO SOMETHING OTHER THAN "DANCES WITH KNOTS" HERE?
IS THE TOUCHY SUBJECT ALLY OR THE ROPES?
OH, IT'S ROPES! SERIOUSLY, MAN. SHE COULDN'T TIE A PROPER KNOT TO SAVE HER LIFE. IT'S LIKE SHE HAS NO THUMBS!
IT'S LIKE YOU AND FIGHTING GAMES!
YOU WEREN'T COMPLAINING ABOUT MY LACK OF THUMBS LAST NIGHT!

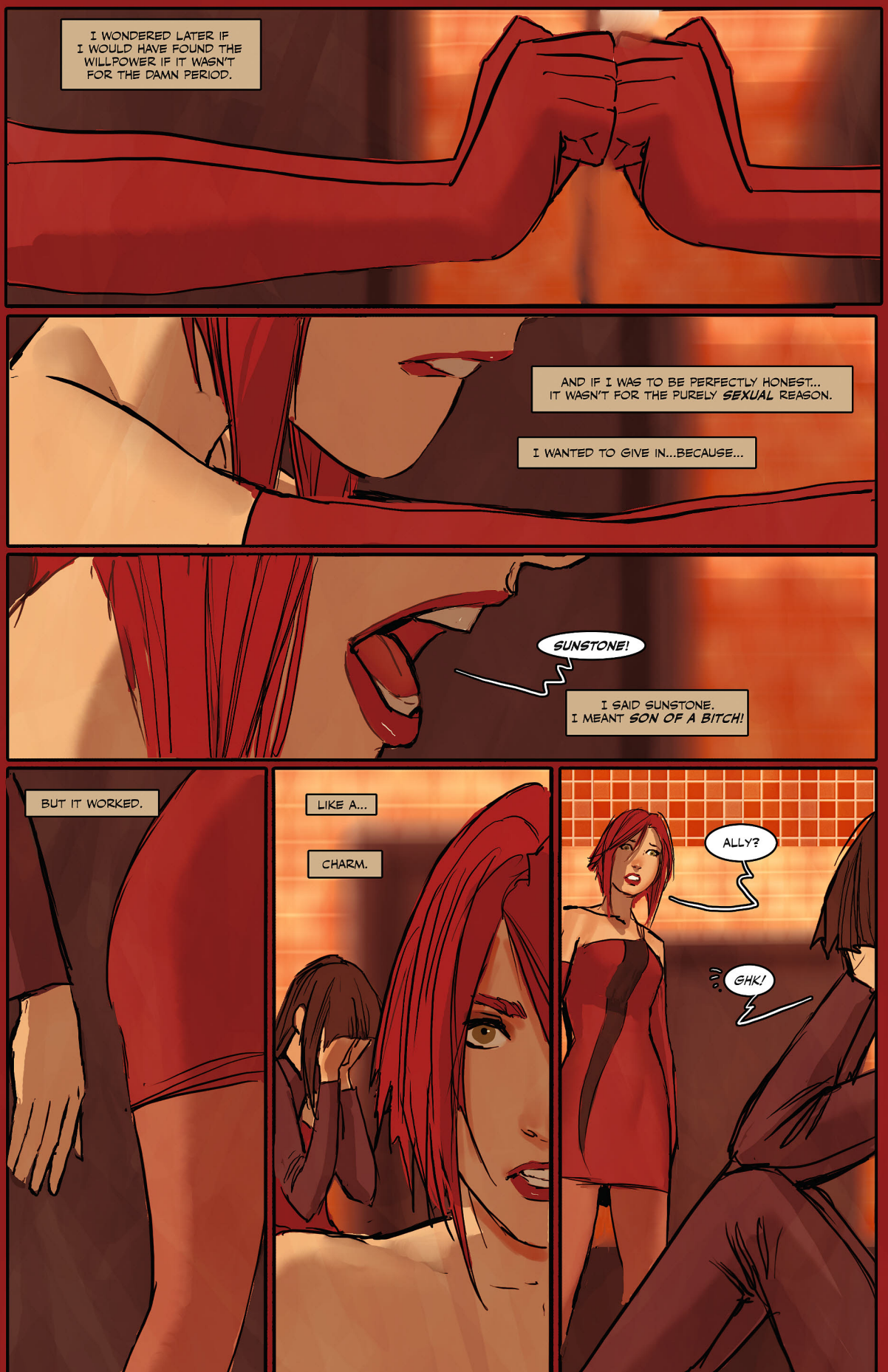
AW, DON'T TAKE IT TOO HARD, I'LL HELP YOU! YOU SEE, THE RABBIT GOES OVER THE LOG, THEN UNDER THE GRASS, AROUND THE FLOWER, AND THEN THROUGH THE TUNNEL!
DROP DEAD!
I'MMA GO AND CHECK UP ON THE GIRLS. SEE IF THE TOILET *ATE* THEM OR SOMETHING.
DIDN'T KNOW ***SHIBARI*** WAS... HER KRYPTONITE.
OH YEAH. YOU STRUCK A NERVE!
I'LL GIVE ALLY THIS... SHE KNEW HOW TO STRIKE MY NERVES ***JUST*** RIGHT.
I REMEMBER TRYING TO PROCESS THAT SUDDEN TURN OF EVENTS, ARGUING WITH MYSELF ON WHETHER IT WAS MY ***CRUSH*** OR JUST THE SEXUAL AROUSAL THAT KEPT ME IN PLACE.


IT WAS THE LOOK IN HER EYES THAT WORRIED ME. IT WAS PARTIALLY HER DOMME LOOK...BUT THERE WAS MORE TO IT. THERE WAS SOMETHING *DESPERATE*...UNSETTLING.
SHE TURNED ME AROUND... BROKE THE EYE CONTACT.
AND I STARTED DELUDING MYSELF.
MAYBE I WAS IMAGINING THINGS.
BEING TURNED ON DURING THOSE DAYS OF THE MONTH IS A *FRUSTRATING* EXPERIENCE.
MADDENINGLY SO WHEN YOU HAVE AN OBJECT BETWEEN YOUR LEGS THAT... WELL...MOVES AROUND *JUST* ENOUGH TO BE HARD TO IGNORE.
SO...YEAH.
THIS WAS A BAD SITUATION.
AND I KNEW IT.
OKAY, SO I MAY NOT HAVE ACTUALLY DONE ANYTHING TO STOP IT. UM, BUT I KNEW IT WAS BAD.
DO I GET POINTS FOR... *NOT* TRYING?

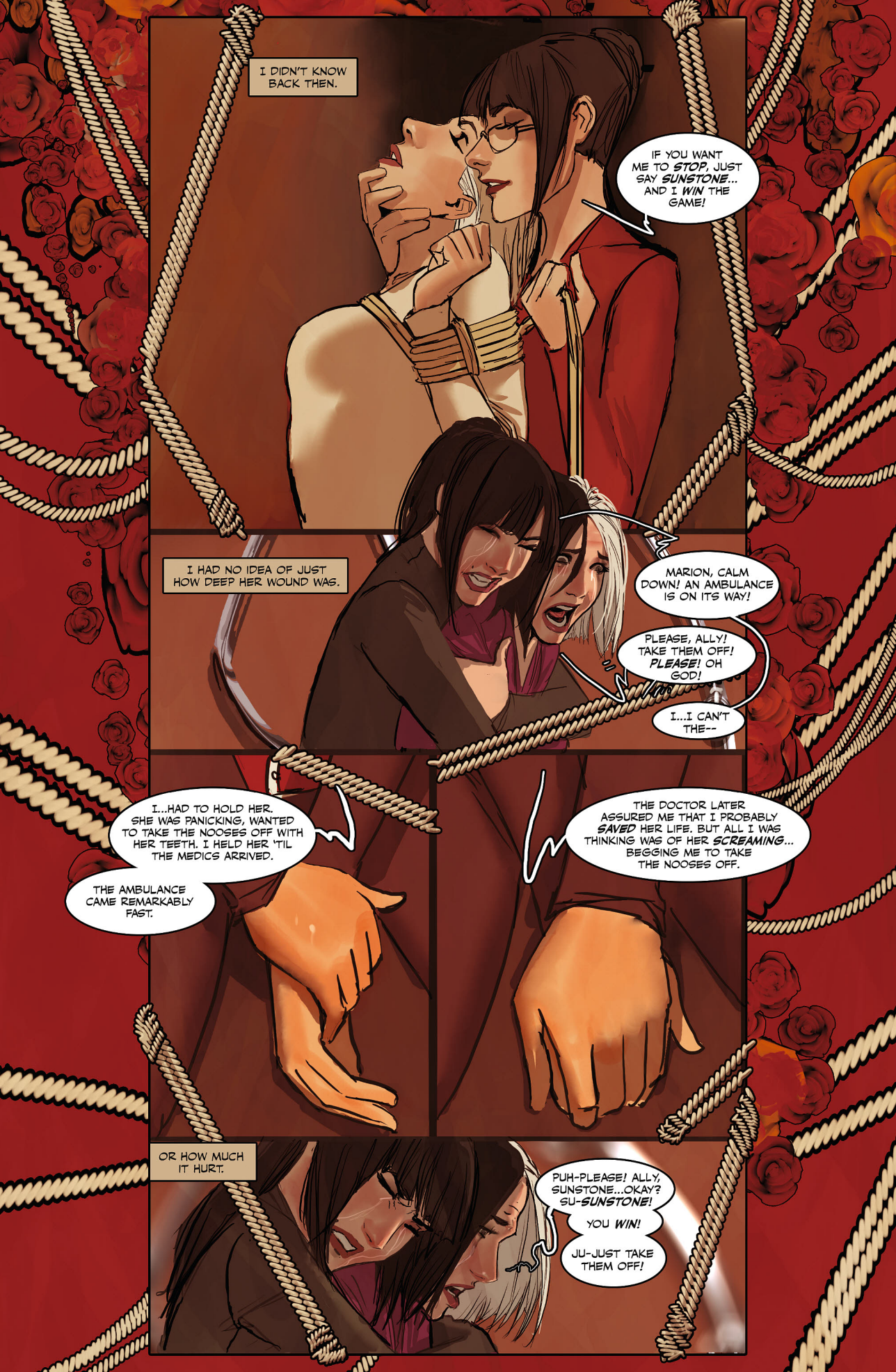

HEY, ALLY, LISA. YOU KNOW THAT TATTOO I'M GETTING? WELL, MY FRIEND ANNE JUST SENT ME THE EARLY DES--
UM...SO...YEAH! I'MMA WAIT *OUTSIDE!*

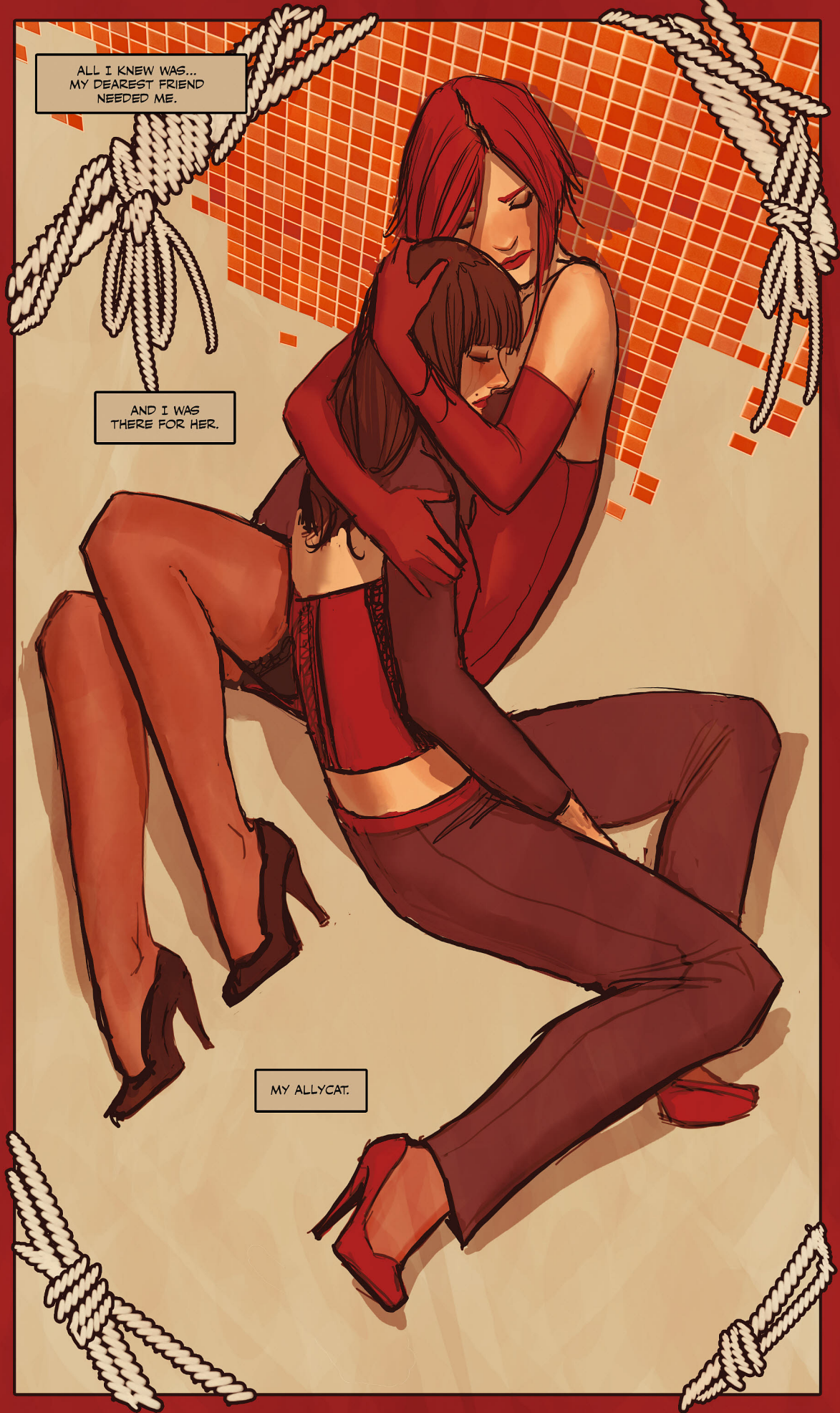

MY MIND WAS A BATTLEGROUND BETWEEN HORMONES AND RATIONAL THOUGHTS.
YES...THE CONVERSATION HELPED HER. THAT'S IT!
SHE WAS...JUST DRUNK. THOUGH SHE SEEMED QUITE SOBER WHEN...OH...DAMN KISSES.
SHE WAS CHEATING HER WAY THROUGH THE GAME. AND...THE NECK THING. UGH. SHE KNEW HOW TO PUSH MY BUTTONS.
BUT I CAN STILL MAKE HER STOP!
I CAN ALWAYS MAKE HER STOP!
JUST WITH ONE WORD.
SUNSTONE!
SUNSTONE...
SUNSTONE...
SUNSTONE....

SO IT TURNS OUT THAT STOPPING SOMETHING YOU REALLY, REAAALLY WANT MIGHT BE A BIT MORE DIFFICULT THAN YOU WOULD THINK.
WHO KNEW?
HOW BAD WAS IT?
WELL...THIS MIGHT REQUIRE MORE IMAGINATION FOR SOME OF YOU THAN OTHERS. TRY TO IMAGINE YOUR DEEPEST DESIRE IS TO FULLY SURRENDER AND BE TAKEN BY YOUR PARTNER...AND YOUR PARTNER KNOWS IT!
KNOWS YOUR EVERY WEAK POINT...AND MASTERFULLY USES THAT KNOWLEDGE. EVERY ATOM OF YOUR BEING WANTS TO GIVE IN, TO SURRENDER, TO SUBMIT.
TO JUST BE YOUR PARTNER'S LOVELY PLAYTHING.
YEAH...THAT.
NOTHING?
OKAY. IT'S YOUR FAVORITE CAKE, AND YOUR SELF-CONTROL IS BEING CHALLENGED!
ANYWAYS...FOR BETTER OR WORSE, I WAS REMINDED THAT THE PAD WAS STILL THERE.


I WONDERED LATER IF I WOULD HAVE FOUND THE WILLPOWER IF IT WASN'T FOR THE DAMN PERIOD.
AND IF I WAS TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST... IT WASN'T FOR THE PURELY SEXUAL REASON.
I WANTED TO GIVE IN...BECAUSE...
SUNSTONE!
I SAID SUNSTONE. I MEANT SON OF A BITCH!
BUT IT WORKED.
LIKE A...
CHARM.
ALLY?
GHK!

THAT DAY ALLY TOLD ME OF HER PAST SCARS.
BUT THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS THIS... TRUST TAKES TIME. SLOWLY GROWN, EASILY BROKEN.
OUR TRUST NEEDED TO GROW FURTHER BEFORE I LEARNED THE *FULL* STORY.


I DIDN'T KNOW BACK THEN.
IF YOU WANT ME TO STOP, JUST SAY SUNSTONE... AND I WIN THE GAME!
I HAD NO IDEA OF JUST HOW DEEP HER WOUND WAS.
MARION, CALM DOWN! AN AMBULANCE IS ON ITS WAY!
PLEASE, ALLY! TAKE THEM OFF! PLEASE! OH GOD!
I...I CAN'T THE--
I...HAD TO HOLD HER. SHE WAS PANICKING, WANTED TO TAKE THE NOOSES OFF WITH HER TEETH. I HELD HER 'TIL THE MEDICS ARRIVED.
THE AMBULANCE CAME REMARKABLY FAST.
THE DOCTOR LATER ASSURED ME THAT I PROBABLY SAVED HER LIFE. BUT ALL I WAS THINKING WAS OF HER SCREAMING... BEGGING ME TO TAKE THE NOOSES OFF.
OR HOW MUCH IT HURT.
PUH-PLEASE! ALLY, SUNSTONE...OKAY? SU-SUNSTONE!
YOU WIN!
JU-JUST TAKE THEM OFF!


ALL I KNEW WAS... MY DEAREST FRIEND NEEDED ME.
AND I WAS THERE FOR HER.
MY ALLYCAT.

PHEW.
CHAPTER TWO DONE!
JEEZ...I'M ONLY AT THIS PART. HEH. FIVE YEARS IS A LONG TIME.
IT'S FUNNY HOW MUCH PEOPLE CAN CHANGE IN SOME WAYS.
THE FUCK?
I FIGURED I'D HAVE TO DRAG YOU AWAY FROM THAT DAMN KEYBOARD SOONER OR LATER.
GET DRESSED! WE'RE GOING OUT WITH MARION AND OTHERS.
YOU'RE SUCH A DUMBASS SOMETIMES!
HEY! WATCH THAT POTTY MOUTH OF YOURS, MISSY! I MIGHT JUST PUNISH YOU FOR IT!
OH, I'M SURE YOU WILL!
STILL...OTHER THINGS REMAIN THE SAME.

AND NOW...
SOME BONUS STUFF!

Sunstone
DECEMBER 24. 2014
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?
NOPE! THAT'S WHEN THE BOOK COMES OUT.
BUT...THAT'S LIKE...THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS?!
WELL...YOU KNOW... NAUGHTY LIST? THERE IS SOMETHING THERE!
NO...NO THERE ISN'T!
I WAS ENDLESSLY AMUSED WHEN I LEARNED THE PUBLISHING DATE OF *SUNSTONE VOLUME 1.*

WHILE THIS PICTURE IS MORE CLOSELY RELATED TO CHAPTER/BOOK FIVE, I'M CONCERNED THAT WITH PROGRESSIVE GROWTH IN EACH CHAPTER, I WOULD FLAT OUT RUN OUT OF ROOM.
SO...I PLACED IT HERE.

AT A CERTAIN POINT I PLANNED ON ALAN MAKING A CATALOGUE OF HIS DESIGNS. WHETHER OR NOT THAT WILL HAPPEN IS STILL UNCERTAIN...
BUT HERE ARE A FEW DESIGNS.

IT'S SHOWTIME!!!
I DON'T GET IT...
YOU WILL IF YOU SAY MY NAME!
HEISENBERG?
FUCK YOU, ALAN!

I DON'T USUALLY LIKE STOCKING STUFFERS, BUT YOU'RE A WONDERFUL EXCEPTION!
HEH!

COVER FOR
SUNSTONE VOLUME 3.

BOOK TWO

I GUESS I SHOULD SAY A FEW WORDS. LET'S KEEP THINGS INTERESTING AND TALK A BIT ABOUT THE CREATIVE PROCESS.

IN BOOK ONE, I SAID *SUNSTONE* WAS AN UNPLANNED LIGHTNING IN THE BOTTLE. TRUTH IS, THE CREATIVE PROCESS ON THIS ENTIRE WEBCOMIC WAS EVEN MORE CHAOTIC THAN YOU MIGHT IMAGINE.

I WOULD TAKE FREE TIME BETWEEN PAID GIGS TO CREATE STRIPS OF *SUNSTONE*. THIS PROCESS WAS SO ERRATIC THAT I NEVER EVEN REREAD THE PREVIOUSLY MADE PAGES. I HONESTLY DIDN'T CARE. TYPO-RIDDEN CHAOS WORKED.

ITS UNPLANNED BEGINNING WAS SPARKED BY A DESIRE TO DO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I WAS ARTISTICALLY DOING. THE RESULT WAS THIS RATHER CARTOONY NEW APPROACH.

IT WAS THE RAW FOUNDATION OF WHAT WOULD, THROUGH CHAPTERS, CRYSTALLIZE INTO MY NEW, RECOGNIZABLE STYLE. IT WAS ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES, PROPORTIONS WERE WONKY, AND AT TIMES, IT DIPPED STRAIGHT INTO *LOONEY TUNES* TERRITORY WITH EXAGGERATED EXPRESSIONS.

STILL, IT WAS SUFFICIENT FOR WHAT I PLANNED AT FIRST...WHICH WAS NOTHING. AS THE STORY PROGRESSED, MY STYLE MATURED. IT TOOK ROOT IN MORE REALISTIC PROPORTIONS. I FOCUSED ON MASTERING A MORE SUBTLE, NUANCED LANGUAGE OF GESTURES AND EXPRESSIONS.

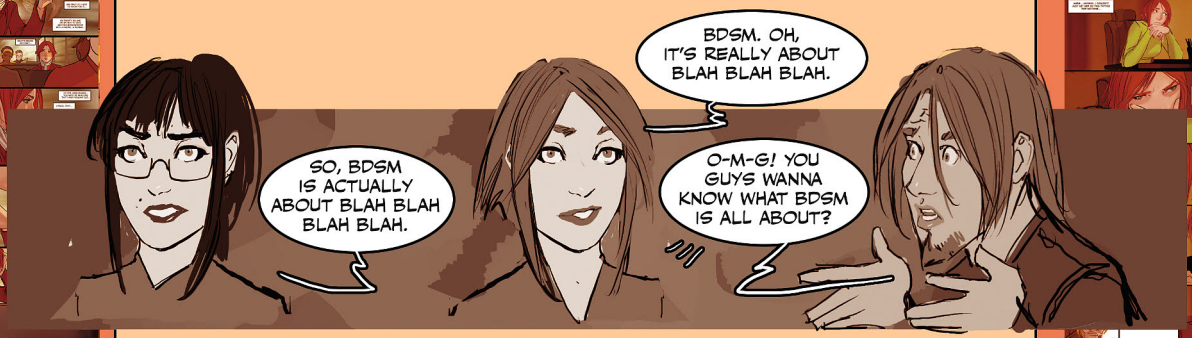
OH, AT TIMES I WOULD STILL DABBLE IN EXAGGERATIONS. I DON'T THINK THAT WILL EVER CHANGE, BUT THE STYLE HAS EVOLVED.

IT WAS WHEN I WAS OFFERED THE CHANCE TO PUBLISH *SUNSTONE* IN PRINT THAT I FACED A DILEMMA.

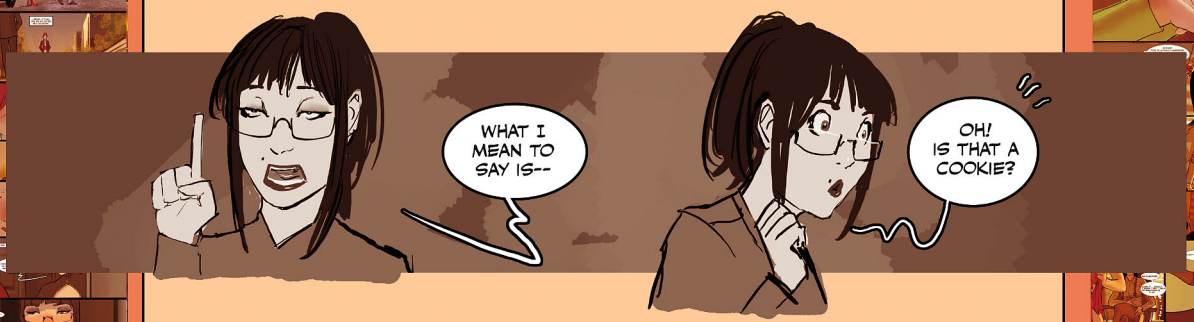
I REREAD THE STORY, AND WHILE IT WAS GOOD, BLATANT MISTAKES RIDDLED ITS SOLID FOUNDATION. THESE MISTAKES WERE THE RESULT OF THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED ERRATIC CREATIVE METHOD.

I NOTICED MANY MISTAKES.

MULTIPLE REPEATING OF SAME EXPOSITIONAL DIALOGUES BETWEEN CHARACTERS ON THE NATURE OF BDSM.


SO, BDSM IS ACTUALLY ABOUT BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH.
BDSM. OH, IT'S REALLY ABOUT BLAH BLAH BLAH.
O-M-G! YOU GUYS WANNA KNOW WHAT BDSM IS ALL ABOUT?

POINTS I WAS TRYING TO MAKE THAT, IN THE END, I NEVER MADE.



PLANNED ONGOING JOKES THAT JUST KIND OF EVAPORATED.

AT THE SAME TIME, I REALIZED MANY OPPORTUNITIES.

IN THE EARLY CREATIVE STAGES, I DITCHED MANY SCENES AND PAGES SIMPLY DUE TO MY LACK OF TIME. FOR INSTANCE, THE ENTIRE EXPANDED PREPARATION SCENES OF ALLY AND LISA IN BOOK ONE. ALLY DOMINATING ALAN IN BOOK TWO, AND MANY MORE.

AND HERE I WAS. MY CHANCE TO TAKE THAT EXTRA EFFORT, GO THAT EXTRA MILE, AND DO IT RIGHT. THIS, HERE, IS THE FINAL CUT. IN THE META OF THE BOOK, YOU MAY CONSIDER THE WEBCOMIC TO BE LISA'S FIRST DRAFT AND THIS THE FINAL VERSION.

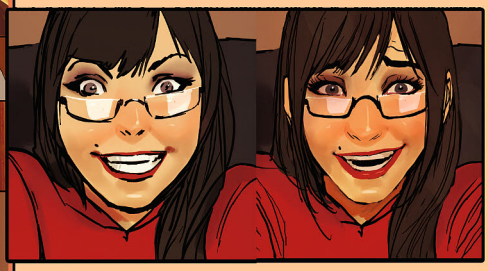
BUT THEN...WITH THAT OPPORTUNITY TO DO THINGS RIGHT CAME A HARD CHOICE.
I KNEW MY STYLE HAD SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED SINCE CHAPTER ONE. AND I KNEW I HAD TO DRAW ADDITIONAL PAGES.

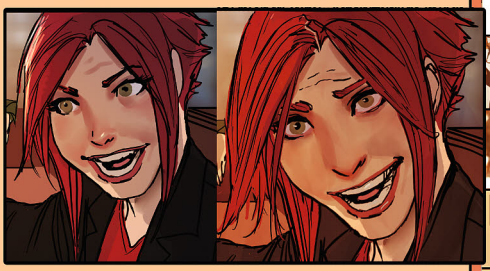
I WOULD EITHER HAVE TO LEAVE ARTWORK IN ITS ORIGINAL STATE AND HAVE THE NEW PAGES CLASH...OR FLAT OUT REWORK EVERYTHING. *SUNSTONE* MEANT TOO MUCH TO ME. THIS BOOK SAVED MY CREATIVITY. IT DESERVED MY BEST EFFORT. MAKE NO MISTAKE, IT WAS NOT AN EASY TASK TO DO.

AND IT WOULD NOT PLEASE EVERYONE. I KNEW FROM THE GET-GO THAT REDUCING SOME EXPRESSIONS TO A MORE NUANCED VERSION TO MATCH THE SITUATION BETTER WOULD STRIKE SOME PEOPLE AS LESS EXPRESSIVE.

WHICH IT IS.

BUT THE REASONING I TOOK WHEN I CHOSE TO SUBDUE THE EXPRESSIONS WAS...WELL...THEY LOOKED TOO DAFFY FOR THE SITUATIONS!





THE WAY I SEE IT, THERE IS A SLIDING SCALE FROM CARTOONISH TO REALISTIC. IN ORDER FOR THE STORY TO READ COHESIVELY, I HAD TO CHOOSE THE STYLISTIC BALANCE THAT COULD PULL OFF BOTH WITHOUT BEING TOO MUCH OF EITHER. YOU SEE THE RESULTS HERE.

NOTABLE STYLISTIC CHANGES WERE:

MORE REALISTIC BODY VOLUMES.

A MORE REALISTIC NOSE SIZE.

A LESS EXAGGERATED AND MORE NUANCED APPROACH TO GESTURES AND EXPRESSIONS TO MATCH THE WIDE ARRAY OF SITUATIONS, RANGING FROM SERIOUS, TO SAD, TO HAPPY, TO SLAPSTICKY.

HOPEFULLY, IF LUCK WILL HAVE IT AND THIS SERIES WORKS OUT, I FULLY PLAN TO DO A SPECIAL COMMENTARY AND COMPARISON BONUS SOME DAY. GIVE YOU ALL AN INSIGHT INTO THE MESS THAT IS MY MIND AND SHOW YOU WHAT MAKES IT TICK.

HINT: IT'S COFFEE--LOTS AND LOTS OF COFFEE!

ANYHOW, SEE YOU ALL IN BOOK THREE...WHERE I REVEAL THE HILARIOUS PATHS THIS STORY COULD HAVE TAKEN.

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RAVINE VOL. 1

Writers: Stjepan Sejic & Ron Marz
Artist: Stjepan Sejic

In a fantastic world far from our own, an ancient magic spell almost split the world in two and left an endless ravine in the north. One man, Nebezial Asheri, driven by the deaths of his wife and daughters will attempt to reclaim that magic and bring his loved ones back to life. The forces of an entire city, Paladia, will rise to oppose him, but his greatest foes will be a ragtag band of an outcast wizard, a dragonrider, and their allies.

RAVINE VOL. 2

Writers: Stjepan Sejic & Ron Marz
Artist: Stjepan Sejic

The balance of power in the kingdom of Palladia is threatened, as schemers plot to overthrow the rightful king. Amid this turmoil, a sorcerer named Stein Phais and a dragon rider named Lynn de Luctes are Wanderers, blessed with great power and destinies that can shape the fate of nations. How long will it be before they are drawn into the conflict?

READ MORE TOP COW

DEATH VIGIL

Writer: Stjepan Sejic
Artist: Stjepan Sejic

Gifted? Join the Death Vigil in their ongoing war against the ever-growing power of the Primordial Enemy! The only catch is you have to die first. Become a corporeal immortal Death Knight and obtain reality-altering weaponry in the never-ending battle between good and evil.

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APHRODITE IX: REBIRTH VOL. 1

Writer: Matt Hawkins
Artist: Stjepan Sejic

Hundreds of years after a cataclysmic event scorched the surface, Earth and its inhabitants have been forever altered and a new landscape and political struggle has taken hold between two distinct factions fighting for control. Aphrodite IX is both anachronism and advanced technology in a world that she no longer recognizes. To survive in this future, she must choose sides in a war that she wants no part in.

APHRODITE IX: REBIRTH VOL. 2

Writer: Matt Hawkins
Artist: Stjepan Sejic

Determined to never be controlled by outside forces again, Aphrodite IX seeks revenge against those who manipulated her. Plus the secrets behind the generational models revealed by Aphrodite XV and Artemis IX.

READ MORE TOP COW

IX TH GENERATION

Writer: Matt Hawkins
Artist: Stjepan Sejic

In the future there is no more natural death, no needs unfilled and everything you could ever want is yours…as long as you're one of the chosen ones to live in this new Utopia and you're willing to subjugate yourself to these new self-proclaimed gods with IX's emblazoned on them. Do the ends truly justify the means? Is a utopia built on genocide worth the price? Aphrodite, Velocity, Hades and the other Nines establish fiefdoms in this new world and attempt to rule. Their internal clashes have escalated, but they are forced to put that aside as they face off against the relentless hordes of the Darkness. The sins of the past have come to claim those who would pretend to be Gods. The cybernetic future established in Aphrodite IX and Cyber Force finally comes face to face with the supernatural Artifact side of the Top Cow universe!

READ MORE TOP COW

THINK TANK

Writer: Matt Hawkins
Artist: Rahsan Ekedal
Cover: Rahsan Ekedal & Brian Reber

Dr. David Loren is many things: child prodigy, inventor, genius, slacker... mass murderer. When a military think tank's smartest scientist decides he can no longer stomach creating weapons of destruction, will he be able to think his way out of his dilemma or find himself subject to the machinations of smaller men?

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WILDFIRE

Writer: Matt Hawkins
Artist: Linda Sejic

Is genetically modified food an end to world hunger or a first class ticket to the apocalypse? Dan Miller is a plant biologist working with a small team perfecting an accelerated plant growth process. When things go wrong, Los Angeles pays the price in a disaster story unlike any before.

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-Bleeding Cool

"Don't overthink it."

Ally and Lisa are your typical couple - they play video games, go on dates, and indulge in extreme BDSM sex while awkwardly avoiding discussing their deeper feelings and desires. Okay, maybe that last bit isn't so typical. Regardless, as the two move further away from the realm of friendship and deeper into the intoxicating world of S&M, the bonds between them grow even tighter, but a secret from Ally's past threatens to tear them further apart.

At the heat of every relationship lies unspoken trust, but for Ally and Lisa, the lines between love and lust, friendship and heartache, constantly blur. In a romance defined by power, telling the truth can be just as risky as keeping secrets.

Equal parts funny, sexy, and heart-wrenching, Sunstone Volume 2 continues Stjepan Sejic's creator-owned smash hit.

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